

# MOVING BEYOND SECESSION

DEFINING  
RUSSIAN  
MENNONITE  
BRETHREN  
MISSION AND  
IDENTITY  
1872-1922



*Abe J. Dueck*



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Mennonite Brethren  
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1872 - 1922**

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Mission and Identity  
1872 - 1922**

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WINNIPEG, MB CANADA



HILLSBORO, KS USA

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**1872 - 1922**

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## Preface

Denominationalism appears to be in rapid decline today and denominational histories are not much in vogue. This is true generally in North America and also seems to apply to Mennonites. To be sure, the age-old disease of divisiveness among Mennonites, despite their professed commitment to peace and nonviolence, is still abundantly evident. Nevertheless, the two largest North American Mennonite denominations are well on the way to a merger, various Mennonite groups are cooperating in institutional projects, several major historical projects telling the stories of Mennonites in the United States and Canada respectively have been completed and cooperation is evident in various other ways. Furthermore, scholarly writing about Anabaptists and Mennonites has become much more oriented toward social history and pays less respect to intellectual and theological (confessional) elements. Women have emerged not only as significant participants in the story but also as interpreters of the story.

Why then another volume that focuses on denominational identity, confessional history and the role of male leaders? The reasons are several. One reason is that there has continued to be a significant gap in primary source materials relating to the Mennonite Brethren movement in Russia, particularly for the period after the 1870s. Scholars have increasingly realized the limitations of the source material provided by Peter M. Friesen's *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*. The fact that it was published approximately a decade before organized congregational life ceased in Russia is also a limiting factor.

The accessibility of materials in the English language is a further important consideration. Only two of the primary sources in this volume have previously appeared in English translations. Many have never been referred to or been available to Mennonite scholars before, including the minutes of the 1882 conference of Mennonite Brethren and Baptists in Rückenau, which had to be translated from Russian from a previously undocumented source.

This volume will, despite its primary focus on the Mennonite Brethren Conference and its leadership, provide materials for a broader scope of inquiry. The documents help to provide a better understanding of the dynamics within the entire Mennonite community in the era before the radical changes brought about by the Bolshevik Revolution. The focus on denominational identity and confessional integrity, however, should also relate very much to the Mennonite agenda today. Questions of identity have been in the forefront for



many Mennonites in recent years. This has been particularly true for Mennonite Brethren. How do Mennonite Brethren relate to Baptists, to North American evangelicals, or to other Mennonite bodies? Have many Mennonite Brethren churches lost a sense of their Mennonite/Anabaptist identity? Do we need to recover something, whether or not it takes the shape of bygone days? What is the role of the Conference?

I would like to acknowledge the help of several people who have contributed in various ways to this volume. James Urry has looked at some of the materials and helped in interpreting them. Although I translated most of the documents, in some cases I used previously unpublished translations (Part IV, Sections 2, 4 and 5). Abe J. Klassen kindly granted permission to use these. Oksana Kudinova from Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine and Albert Wardin from Nashville, Tennessee helped locate copies of the Russian minutes of the 1882 Mennonite Brethren-Baptist conference, and Olga and Alexandra Jelkine did the initial translating. Ella Federau gave additional help. William Schroeder helped locate Mennonite Brethren congregations on the maps and Weldon Hiebert prepared the final maps. Paul Toews, the Director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, California has repeatedly prompted me to work on a volume of sources, even though the final product is not what we initially envisioned.

The joy and excitement of discovering previously unutilized primary sources is one that many scholars will understand and appreciate. I hope this volume will prompt more interest in Russian Mennonite studies and contribute in a small way to a better understanding of this era.

*Abe J. Dueck*  
*December 1997*



## **Part I**

### **Introduction**



## The Mennonite Brethren Conference in Russia, 1872-1922

The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia began functioning as a conference (*Mennonitenbrüder Bundesgemeinde*) in 1872, just twelve years after the birth of the church. As such, it was the first Mennonite body in Russia to organise itself as a conference. The old Church (often called the *Mennonitengemeinden* or *Kirchliche*) did not officially meet as a conference until January 1883, although there were various conferences of church elders and other leaders before this date.<sup>1</sup> The old Church conference, which at times included Mennonite Brethren, convened under various names such as "*Bundeskonferenz*," "*Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Russland*," or "*Allgemeine Konferenz der Vertreter der Mennonitengemeinden Russlands*."<sup>2</sup> Minutes of these conferences (1879-1913) were compiled and published in 1913, just before World War I, during which no conferences were permitted.<sup>3</sup> At least seven additional general conferences took place from 1917 to 1926, as well as an All-Mennonite Congress in 1917.<sup>4</sup>

Mennonite Brethren learned much of their early church polity and practice from the German Baptists. The "exuberant movement" of the early 1860s resulted in some very disorderly conduct in worship and the emergence of despotic religious leadership.<sup>5</sup> The reforms of 1865 soon brought more stability. Several individuals belonging to the German Baptists in Hamburg were called on to help

1 See James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1989), 174ff. on the beginnings of a "Church Council" (*Kirchenkonvent*) in the Molotschna colony in 1850.

2 Cornelius Krahn, "Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Russland," *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* (hereafter ME).

3 Heinrich Ediger, *Beschlüsse der von den Geistlichen und Anderen Vertretern der Mennoniten-Gemeinden Russlands Abgehaltenen Konferenzen für die Jahre 1879 bis 1913* (Berdiansk, Heinrich Ediger, 1914).

4 The minutes of most of these conferences are published in John B. Toews, *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975). In addition to the conferences listed by Toews, there were conferences in Landeskrona in 1918, in Rudnerweide in 1919, and in Chortitza in 1922. See "Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz," ME. Part II of the minutes of the Landeskrona conference on 3-4 December 1918 are in *Friedensstimme*, 25 January 1919, 1-3. The previous issue, which presumably carried Part I, is not available but may still be discovered in Russian archives.

5 See Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789 - 1910)*, trans. and ed., J. B. Toews et. al. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), ch. 18.

bring order to the movement, especially in Chortitza. These included August Liebig, Karl Benzien, and Gerhard Oncken. The first to arrive was August Liebig, who spent time with the Mennonite Brethren in 1866 and then returned in 1871. Soon after his arrival he called and chaired a brotherhood meeting<sup>6</sup>—a frequent occurrence thereafter. He also asked the brethren to appoint someone to take minutes so that a record of decisions would be available. The brethren adopted various procedures that were new and “enlightening” to them. Friesen comments that the brethren “hungered altogether too much after order and method during the years 1866-1870 ff.”<sup>7</sup> Liebig’s influence on the brethren continued for some time, even after he moved to Odessa in 1875.<sup>8</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren Church initially had its center in Molotschna and Chortitza (Einlage), but by 1863 settlements had also begun in the Kuban. The first meeting house<sup>9</sup> was the combined church-school that was erected in the Mennonite Brethren settlement of Andreasfeld, begun in 1870. August Liebig lived next to this building with his family for a year and it was also the setting for the first Mennonite Brethren conference in 1872. Andreasfeld, located about seventeen miles east of Chortitza, was therefore the home of the Einlage congregation for many years.<sup>10</sup> Initial efforts to build a meetinghouse for the Molotschna congregation in Ladekopp failed, but in 1874 the congregation purchased a former tavern in Rückenau and remodelled it as a place of worship.<sup>11</sup>

By the Mennonite Brethren Church’s twenty-fifth anniversary on January 6, 1885 there were six main congregations (Molotschna, Einlage, Kuban, Friedensfeld-Sagradovka, Don settlement, Volga settlement) and seventeen groups affiliated with the main congregations. By this time there were already some congregations established in the United States as a result of the 1870s migration. The congregations in the United States officially established a conference in 1879; a record of all North American conferences is extant.

The Mennonite Brethren General Conference in Russia usually met annually in May or early June at various locations, and also met for regional and local conferences and brotherhood meetings at various

6 Ibid., 340.

7 Ibid., 461.

8 Ibid., 467. Later he also ministered to the Mennonite Brethren in the United States.

See P. M. Friesen, “Ein Brief,” *Zionsbote*, 14 May 1902, 3.

9 The usual term for such buildings for worship was *Bethaus* (literally, “house of prayer”).

10 P. H. Berg, “Andreasfeld,” ME.

11 P. M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 493-494.



Recent photograph of the new Rüchenau Mennonite Brethren Church built in 1883.  
Credits: Rudy Friesen

times. None of the records of regional or local conferences appear to have survived, although greater access to various archives in the former Soviet Union may result in the discovery of additional materials. Unfortunately, even the minutes of the annual general conferences have, for the most part, been lost except for the seven sets of minutes included here. Peter M. Friesen's extensive documentation does not include any minutes, although he did include some reports delivered at these conferences and made other references to some conferences. The earliest minutes available are those of the joint Baptist/Mennonite Brethren Conference in Rückenau in 1882. These were published years later by several hostile sources closely connected with Russian Orthodoxy. According to P. M. Friesen, Johann Wieler independently invited the Baptists to the annual meeting to promote a close working relationship with them. When he attempted to do the same in 1883, the elders strongly opposed him and the effort failed.<sup>12</sup> In 1884 Wieler assisted in organizing the Russian Baptist Union and became its first president.<sup>13</sup>

12 P. M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 514.

13 See Lawrence Klippenstein, "Russian Evangelicalism Revisited: Ivan Kargel and the Founding of the Russian Baptist Union," *Baptist History and Heritage* 27 (April 1992): 42-48, and Lawrence Klippenstein, "Johann Wieler (1839-1889) Among Russian Evangelicals: A New Source of Mennonites and Evangelicalism in Imperial Russia," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5 (1987): 44-60.



Other sources of information on early conferences are few. After the turn of the century the *Zionsbote* published one set of minutes in 1903 and at least one detailed report which appears in this volume. The *Friedensstimme* published at least two sets of minutes, but it only began publication in 1903 and a complete set of issues is still not available. Minutes for the years 1910, 1912, 1913 and 1918, which also appear in this volume, may have been the only ones published in the period from 1909 to 1917. The authorities canceled the conferences of 1909 and 1911 and, with the outbreak of the war in 1914, all German language publication had to cease. Russia entered the war against Germany in early August.<sup>14</sup> Although a conference was held on May 9-11, 1914, the minutes may not have been released because the government was showing new concerns about sectarian activity. References to conferences elsewhere are very scattered. Perhaps this publication of extant minutes will stimulate further research and result in the discovery of additional records.

The agenda of the Mennonite Brethren conferences was quite diverse. Major issues included particularly the itinerant ministry and missions and evangelism (in Russia, India and Bulgaria). Several interesting issues emerged during the joint conference in 1882 with the Baptists, including miraculous healing by prayer, anointing with oil, and the policy regarding Christians who had been baptized as infants and sought admission to communion without rebaptism.<sup>15</sup> Other issues included financial support for students preparing for ministry and missions, Bible courses for ministers, establishment of a Bible school, intermarriage with other Mennonites, periodical publishing (*Erntefeld*), spiritual nurture of children and youth, government regulations for religious bodies, forestry service and financial support for printing of Bibles.

The Conference was essentially an advisory body and so its decisions were not binding on individual congregations. Local brotherhood meetings met to endorse or reject its decisions. As P. M. Friesen states, however, the congregations seldom rejected the decisions of the Conference. In fact,

the decisions of the conference were accepted almost without exception by every church, and the confidence of the churches in the annual conference was almost limitless, some-

14 See *Botschafter*, 15 July 1914, 3.

15 P. M. Friesen comments briefly on the discussions of open communion at this conference as well as his own decision not to be bound on this matter. See *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 499.



thing that was natural since every congregation sent its most trusted men to the annual meeting—its elders, ministers and other proven brethren; through these representatives such a close bond of fellowship was created between all the districts of various elders and other divisions that all the congregations of the M.B. Conference became conscious of such a solid unity as was not the case with the congregations of the Mennonite Church in Russia.<sup>16</sup>

The Conference consisted of several independent congregations (*Gemeinden*), each of which possessed an official seal and had at least one elder and several ordained ministers and deacons. Each independent congregation, in turn, might have several affiliated congregations or stations, each with one or more ministers and deacons and, occasionally, an elder. The independent congregation and its affiliates were also sometimes called a conference. The affiliated congregations were sometimes far removed from the mother congregation. Molotschna, for example, had fourteen affiliated congregations in 1905 besides its main congregation in Rückenau. There was only one elder (at Rückenau) and thirty-three ministers (nine at Rückenau), plus seventeen candidates for the ministry. Of the fourteen affiliated congregations, only five were in the Molotschna and one was as far away as western Siberia, although it possessed its own seal. One congregation in distant Turkestan was not officially a member of the conference but sent representatives to the annual conventions and supported the mission work of the conference.

The most detailed statistics of the conference available are those published by Heinrich Braun for 1905 and 1906.<sup>17</sup> These reports

16 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 514. The process of ratification of Conference decisions by local congregations is well illustrated by the *Glaubensbekenntnis der Vereinigten Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinde in Russland* (Halbstadt, 1902). A list of the congregations and the representatives who signed on behalf of the congregations, confirming their acceptance of the Confession, is given on pages 58-69.

17 H. Braun, *Bundes-Statistik der Vereinigten, Taufgesinnten, Mennonitischen Brüder-Gemeinde in Russland. 1905*, (Nikolaipol, 1906) and *Bundes-Statistik der Vereinigten, Taufgesinnten, Mennonitischen Brüder-Gemeinde in Russland. 1906* (Nikolaipol, 1907).

These reports, published on behalf of the Conference, have probably never been cited by western scholars. The first was housed in the Mennonite Library & Archives at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas. Copies of both are now also housed at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS) in Winnipeg. The second was recently discovered by Terry Martin, a scholar who has probed the various archives of the former Soviet Union and discovered many interesting materials.

The statistical tables included in this volume need to be used with care because they do not indicate which congregations did not report in given years. More accurate comparisons can be made on the basis of detailed congregational reports included in the original.

gave detailed information not only about memberships of individual congregations and affiliates but also about baptisms, excommunications, choir members, Sunday school attendance, meeting houses and financial contributions. Peter M. Friesen and other sources give some information about these matters, but it is not nearly as comprehensive and systematic. Similar reports may have been published in other years, but have not yet been discovered.

One of the most effective means of promoting the growth and unity of the congregations in the conference was through the services of the itinerant ministers. These ministers often spent long periods traveling from congregation to congregation with only modest financial compensation. Itinerant ministers whose names appear frequently in the extant minutes after 1903 include Herman A. Neufeld, Jakob Wiens, Peter Köhn and Abraham Wall. The most detailed record of such a ministry is preserved in the journals of Herman Neufeld. In 1922 Neufeld stated that he had attended all of the annual conferences since 1887.<sup>18</sup> At the annual conference in 1914 Neufeld reported that during the previous twenty-five years he had spent 3,245 days on mission tours, preached 3,259 sermons, made 3,763 home visitations, travelled 200,000 kilometers (*verst*s) on trains, 15,000 kilometers on steamships and 25,000 kilometers by carriage or sleigh.<sup>19</sup>

In 1906, at the General Conference of the Mennonite Congregations in Russia, the question of inviting the Mennonite Brethren to the annual conferences was raised.<sup>20</sup> This was prompted by an inquiry in the *Botschafter* by a Mennonite Brethren reader who questioned the right of the Conference to call itself a "General Conference" when not all Mennonites were represented.<sup>21</sup> The convention decided that henceforth the Mennonite Brethren should also be invited, especially because there were so many common concerns such as education and the forestry service. Nevertheless, nothing concrete seems to have resulted from this decision. According to Friesen, individual Mennonite Brethren occasionally attended in response to special invitations by influential church elders from the Molotschna, but

18 Journals of Herman A. Neufeld, Book VI, p. 541. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg (henceforth CMBS).

Most of the conferences are also briefly noted in *Herman and Katharina: Their Story: The Autobiography of Elder Herman A. and Katharina Neufeld in Russia and in Canada*, trans. and ed. by Abram H. Neufeld (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1984).

19 Neufeld, *Herman and Katharina*, 70.

20 Ediger, *Beschlüsse*, 115.

21 "Zwei Bemerkungen zu den Beschlüssen der Allgemeinen Konferenz (Eine Bruderstimme aus der Molotschnaer Bruderschaft)," *Botschafter*, 2 July 1906, 9.



their presence created discomfort on both sides.<sup>22</sup> On February 7, 1908 a convention dealing with Mennonites and the state met in Alexanderwohl.<sup>23</sup> This convention included representatives of all three Mennonite groups (*Allianz* or Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Brethren and old Church Mennonites). However, it was not a General Conference, and only Molotschna Mennonites participated. According to P. M. Friesen, the General Conference was renamed the "General Conference of the Mennonite Ministry in Russia" several years before 1910.<sup>24</sup> Heinrich Ediger's compilation of minutes includes two sets of minutes for 1909: the "*Konferenz des Mennonitischen Lehrstandes in Russland*" (September 8) and the "*Allgemeiner Konferenz*" in Schönfeld on October 14 and 15.<sup>25</sup> The designation of the first of the two conferences appears to reflect Friesen's statement, but the implications are not clear. Was this an attempt to create two separate conferences, one including all Mennonite groups and the other only the old Church congregations? If so, later conferences did not reveal a continuation of this pattern. The General Conference of 1910 at Schönsee (Oct. 26-29) was the most ecumenical of all the conferences and included representatives of all three groups. According to Friesen, about one-third of the representatives were Mennonite Brethren.<sup>26</sup>

From 1911 to 1913 the General Conference continued to convene annually. Mennonite Brethren representatives participated to a limited extent. The 1911 convention was in Berdiansk and the Mennonite Brethren were to participate beginning on the second day of deliberations.<sup>27</sup> The minutes of the convention, however, do not suggest such a division of the conference. Herman Neufeld reported that he was a participant at the convention.<sup>28</sup> A conference resolution stated that the invitation to the next convention (1912) would include all Mennonite congregations, but contained no specific reference to Mennonite Brethren. In 1914 Friesen complained that the invitation to the General Convention in 1913 had reserved the entire first day as closed sessions for the old Mennonite congregations.<sup>29</sup> He

22 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 645.

23 *Ibid.*, 629 ff.

24 *Ibid.*, 646.

25 Ediger, *Beschlüsse*, 129-130.

26 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 645-650.

27 Ediger, *Beschlüsse*, 138.

28 Neufeld, Herman and Katharina, 65.

29 P. M. Friesen, *Konfession oder Sekte? Der Gemeinsame Konvent in Schönwiese am 7 März und die Kommission in Halbstadt am 11 u. 12 April 1914* (Raduga, 1914), 11.

also was offended that the invitation suggested that the initial sessions (excluding Mennonite Brethren) might extend into the second day, thus leaving Mennonite Brethren delegates in a very awkward position.<sup>30</sup> The minutes of the Convention do not show that the conference was divided into two sections or indicate the level of Mennonite Brethren participation in it.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, the Mennonite Brethren conference also continued its annual spring conventions to the extent possible. The Russian State and the Orthodox Church were very suspicious of various sectarian groups and often tried to disrupt and limit Mennonite Brethren activities. Mennonite Brethren were usually considered more dangerous than other Mennonites because of their links with Baptists and Russian sectarian evangelicals such as the Stundists. They engaged in proselytizing activities, which threatened the Orthodox Church. The deep suspicion and animosity toward these groups is very evident in the comments of M. A. Kalvev and V. Skortzov in their prefaces to the minutes of 1882.

Although the period immediately after the "reforms" of 1905 had resulted in considerable religious freedom for most religious sects, including the Mennonite Brethren, this did not last long. By 1908 the situation was much more tense and the status of various religious bodies was very uncertain. In 1909, for example, the convention scheduled for Petrovka was cancelled,<sup>32</sup> although a "quiet" meeting of some delegates nevertheless took place in Alexanderheim. The Raduga Press, which the Mennonite Brethren controlled, came under scrutiny. In 1911 the annual convention in the Kuban was also cancelled and an "unofficial" conference took place a few days later in Alexanderpol, Memrik and in the home of Herman Neufeld in Nikolaievka.<sup>33</sup>

The government placed stringent requirements on the convening of conventions and on how records were to be kept. Officials had to be notified well in advance about plans for a convention and had to grant permission before the convention could convene. Sometimes local officials were very difficult, even when the central government in St. Petersburg had given permission.<sup>34</sup> There was also surveillance at the meetings. One official, Semen Dmitrievich Bondar, attended many

30 See Abe Dueck, "Mennonites, the Russian State and the Crisis of Brethren and Old Church Relations in Russia, 1910-1918," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69 (Oct. 1995): 453-485.

31 Ediger, *Beschlüsse*, 153-157.

32 See P. M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 536. See also the Journals of Herman A. Neufeld, Vol. II, 257, and *Friedensstimme*, 27 May 1909.

33 Journals of Herman A. Neufeld, Vol. 2, 339-342.

34 Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 536.



*Annual convention of Mennonite Brethren churches in Russia meeting in Tige, Sagradovka, May 14-15, 1910. Semen Dmitrievich Bondar is in the front row, fourth from left. Credit: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, MB.*



sectarian meetings during this period, including those of the Mennonite Brethren. A picture of conference delegates in 1910 shows two Russian officials, Bondar and Pristov, in the middle of the front row.<sup>35</sup> Herman Neufeld states that the 1913 conference accomplished little because of the constant presence of several officials from St. Petersburg.<sup>36</sup> The final Sunday festival was forbidden, says Neufeld, and "everyone went home rather disappointed." In 1914 the conference took place in Millerovo and ended with an ordination service for William Dyck. Although the minutes of the conference are not available, a detailed report of the ordination service of Dyck appeared in the *Friedensstimme*.<sup>37</sup> The report does not refer to the conference that had convened during the preceding days. The political climate during these years was also largely responsible for prompting the various discussions and inter-Mennonite meetings that took place from early 1908 to 1917.<sup>38</sup>

Individuals who were elected at the beginning of each convention chaired the annual conferences. Usually a local minister or elder opened the conference and welcomed the delegates, after which elections for the various positions took place. Prominent leaders during the final decade of the Mennonite Brethren Conference in Russia (ca. 1908-1918), included Heinrich J. Braun, Gerhard Regehr and Herman A. Neufeld. Other emerging leaders included Benjamin B. Janz, Abram H. Unruh and William Dyck, who continued in leadership after they migrated to Canada in the 1920s.

Heinrich J. Braun chaired most of the conference sessions during this period, including the 1912 and 1913 conferences and possibly the 1910 conference. He was also the vice-chairman in 1918. Braun, a graduate of the Hamburg Baptist Seminary, returned to Russia in 1899 and was very active as a leader both in the Mennonite Brethren conference and the larger Mennonite community in Russia. He was the major shareholder in the Raduga Press which published the *Friedensstimme* and many books and pamphlets, including P. M. Friesen's *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*. In 1918 he became a teacher at the newly founded Tschongrav Bible School in Crimea. He migrated to Germany in

35 In 1915 Semen Dmitrievich Bondar published his book, *Sekta Mennonitov v Rossii v svyazi s istoriei nemetskoi kolonizatsii na iuge Rossii* (Petrograd, 1916). A copy of a translation by Jakob Rempel is at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg.

36 Neufeld, *Herman and Katharina*, 68.

37 *Friedensstimme*, May 31, June 4, June 7, 1914.

38 For a detailed discussion of these events see Abe Dueck, "Mennonites and the Russian State."



1922, where he died in 1946.<sup>39</sup> Neither the *Mennonitische Rundschau* nor the *Zionsbote* carried his obituary. According to Cornelius Krahn, Braun became involved in a healing ministry in Germany.<sup>40</sup>

Gerhard Regehr was chair or vice-chairman of the 1910 conference, vice-chairman of the 1913 conference, and chair of the 1918 conference. The Einlage Church ordained him to the ministry in 1895 and as elder in 1903. He served there as leader for twenty years. He emigrated from Russia to the United States in 1923 and initially settled in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Later he lived for a while in Seattle.<sup>41</sup> He died in Los Angeles in 1960 and was buried in Yarrow, British Columbia.

Herman A. Neufeld, vice-chairman of the 1912 conference, was best known as an itinerant minister in Russia. He probably attended more Mennonite Brethren conferences than any other individual and his journals refer to most of these. In 1923 he migrated to Canada, where he continued his itinerant ministry for several years.<sup>42</sup>

The Mennonite Brethren Conference in Russia had no official periodical, although several periodicals were essentially Mennonite Brethren in sponsorship and focus. Abraham and Jakob Kröker founded the *Friedensstimme* in 1903. It was first published in Berlin and later by Raduga in Halbstadt. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914 it ceased publication but reappeared sporadically under various names in subsequent years.<sup>43</sup> Mennonite Brethren missionaries in India began *Das Erntefeld* in 1900. Its editor was Abraham Friesen. The Conference financially supported the publication and in 1910 decided not to establish its own conference periodical because reports related to conference activity could appear in *Das Erntefeld*.

The official name of the Mennonite Brethren Conference seems to have varied during this time. Unofficially, the conference was often

39 Heinrich Braun was the brother of Peter J. Braun who was responsible for the creation of the Mennonite Archive, much of which was recently discovered by Harvey L. Dyck and George Epp and which has become available on microfilm. See Ingrid I. Epp and Harvey L. Dyck, *The Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive, 1803-1920: A Research Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). On the role of the Braun brothers, see Abraham Friesen, *History and Renewal in the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition* (North Newton, Kans.: Bethel College, 1994).

40 "Braun, Heinrich Jakob," ME. Abraham Friesen, in comments to the author, explained that this "healing ministry" was not to be understood in terms of the spiritual gifts of healing but in terms of herbal medicine and other natural remedies.

41 See "Ältester Gerhard P. Regehr," in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 30 March 1960, 1.

42 See Neufeld, *Herman and Katharina*, 149 ff.

43 See John B. Toews, "Russian Mennonite Periodical: A Voice of Peace in Troubled Times," *Mennonite Life* 27 (1972): 93-94.

simply called "brethren" or "Mennonite Brethren." Bondar, in his work, *Sekta Mennonitov*, usually called them "new" Mennonites.<sup>44</sup> The Confession of Faith officially adopted by the Mennonite Brethren Conference on May 18, 1900, used the name *Vereinigten Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinde in Russland* (United Christian Baptist-minded Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia),<sup>45</sup> and this designation was also used in the official statistical reports of the Conference of 1905 and 1906.<sup>46</sup> Peter M. Friesen, whose work is not exclusively on the Mennonite Brethren, used the name "*Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*." This name reflected the theory that Anabaptists originated in the old medieval evangelical sects such as the Waldensians,<sup>47</sup> and was not necessarily a specific designation for the Mennonite Brethren.<sup>48</sup> The official minutes of the 1910, 1912 and 1913 Mennonite Brethren conferences used almost the same designation as the 1900 Confession of Faith. The 1918 minutes, published in Abraham H. Unruh's *Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde*, however simply used the name "*Vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde*" (United Mennonite Brethren Church).<sup>49</sup> It is clear that Mennonite Brethren leaders such as P. M. Friesen and Heinrich J. Braun were very conscious of the significance of the name in establishing a clear identity for the Mennonite Brethren. They were concerned about being Mennonites and about distinguishing themselves from the Baptists. Simultaneously, they placed themselves in the middle of a longer tradition of religious dissent that preceded the Reformation.

Peter M. Friesen documents many of the struggles of the Mennonite Brethren concerning their identity and recognition during the earlier period. The Mennonite Brethren had to deal with this question on at least two major fronts. One was in relation to fellow Mennonites, who often wanted to dismiss them as Baptists.<sup>50</sup> The

44 *Sekta Mennonitov v Rossii*, 107 ff.

45 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Vereinigten Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinde in Russland* (Halbstadt, 1902).

46 See H. Braun, *Bundes-Statistic*, 1905 and *Bundes-Statistic*, 1906.

47 See Abraham Friesen, *History and Renewal*, ch. 1.

48 Friesen states specifically that he used the term Mennonite "brotherhood" to refer to the entire Mennonite fellowship. See P. M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 987, note 22.

49 A. H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde 1860-1954* (Hillsboro, Kans.: General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1955).

50 For detailed discussions of these issues, see especially Heinrich Löwen, *In Vergessenheit genetzte Beziehungen: Frühe Begegnungen der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde mit dem Baptismus in Russland—ein Überblick* (Bielefeld, Germany: Logos-Verlag, 1989), and various essays in *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation*, ed. Paul Toews, *Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought*, no. 7 (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993).



introduction of immersion as the mode of baptism, the influence of Baptists on issues of polity, and the interaction with Baptists in evangelism and missions gave credibility to accusations that they were Baptist. The Einlage Confession of Faith of 1876, adopted in response to inquiries by government officials regarding the identity of the Mennonite Brethren, was essentially a reproduction of the Hamburg German Baptist Confession of Faith of 1848, with the addition of some distinctively Mennonite articles on non-resistance, foot washing and the oath. An appendix to the Confession identified the major differences between the Mennonite Brethren and the Baptists and specified the reasons why they had left the Mennonite churches. It also identified the differences between Mennonite Brethren and the old Mennonite churches. The official confirmation by the state in 1880 that it would regard the Mennonite Brethren as Mennonites did not end the debate within the larger Mennonite community.

The other struggle, already briefly mentioned, related to the government and the Orthodox Church, which were extremely wary of the proselytizing activities of various sects and wanted to ban such activities. Despite the assurances given by the government in 1880, difficulties persisted, and evangelical sects were repeatedly under severe pressure from the Orthodox clergy. After continued unrest the state again ruled in favor of the Mennonite Brethren in 1896.<sup>51</sup> The Mennonite Brethren often cited these documents in their dealings with the government and in their arguments with fellow Mennonites.

In 1902 the Mennonite Brethren finally published the new Confession of Faith (accepted in 1900), which sought to establish a clear Mennonite Brethren confessional identity within the Mennonite family. The appendix of the 1876 Confession was not included. Six years later, however, Heinrich Epp published a separate pamphlet entitled *Verschiedenheiten zwischen den vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden, sowie den alten Mennonitengemeinden*. In his preface he explained that the old Mennonites had changed drastically since the 1870s and therefore it might not be necessary to repeat all the differences between Mennonite Brethren and the other Mennonites. Nevertheless, he decided to reissue the statements in gratitude to God for causing such profound changes in their circumstances.<sup>52</sup>

51 P. M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 527.

52 See text of translated document below. Heinrich Epp's preface probably did not help to mute the frequent charges that Mennonite Brethren were guilty of spiritual pride.

The last decade under the Tsars in Russia brought more difficulties regarding Mennonite identity. In 1905 the Russian government introduced measures to provide a greater degree of religious freedom in the country. In subsequent years many sectarian groups such as the Baptists flourished and won many converts. This in turn prompted the Orthodox Church to greater opposition to the sects while the government sought to clarify legislation regarding various religious bodies. The Mennonite Brethren in particular were under strict surveillance by government authorities and were in danger of being classified as a sect. The Mennonite community tried hard to present a common front to the government and to classify all Mennonites as a "confession" rather than as a "sect."<sup>53</sup> The documents by P. M. Friesen (*Confession or Sect*), Heinrich Braun (*On the Mennonite Question and Explanation*) and the constitutions of 1914 and 1917 reveal the intense pressure that related to questions of identity and recognition during this time.

The Mennonite Brethren Conference met on at least three occasions after 1914. The minutes of September 1918 refer to a decision made at the sessions on 28-29 May 1917 in Waldheim. This conference met during the time that a provisional government was in power under Kerensky after the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917.

The conference met for what was probably its final session in mid-September of 1922. Herman Neufeld states that a total of twenty-four representatives attended the conference in Memrik, which was chaired by William Dyck with the assistance of Abram Unruh.<sup>54</sup> No representatives attended from the Old Colony, Fürstenland, Samara, Orenburg or Siberia. Little was accomplished—the main concerns related to the desperate situation which the Mennonites found themselves in after the years of revolution and famine. Many were planning to emigrate. Thus ended this significant chapter in the early history of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and the Soviet Union.

The Mennonite Brethren Church, of course, did not cease to exist in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. To some extent, individual congregations continued to function into the early 1930s, although many church leaders were exiled. Then all congregational life ceased. During the German occupation from 1941 to 1943 dur-

53 See Abe Dueck, "Mennonites and the Russian State."

54 Neufeld, *Herman and Katherina*, 136.

ing World War II, congregational life again revived briefly, but many thousands were again forced to flee the advancing Soviet armies and, after much hardship, escaped to new homes in North and South America. Others were not so fortunate and experienced much hardship and persecution in Siberia and other areas of the eastern Soviet Union. In time many Mennonite Brethren began worshipping with the Baptists who practised the same mode of baptism and received official recognition as the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian-Baptists in 1944. Others joined the more sectarian Baptists that formed the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Some Baptist churches consisted mostly of former Mennonite Brethren.

In 1956 another chapter in the evolution of Mennonite Brethren began to unfold. A large Mennonite Brethren Church was organized in Karaganda, at first functioning illegally. In 1967 it received formal recognition as a Mennonite Brethren Church and in subsequent years other independent Mennonite Brethren churches emerged. By 1980 there were at least sixteen independently organized Mennonite Brethren congregations that were relatively uniform in worship and theology, although no conference structure re-emerged.<sup>55</sup>

Still another significant development of the last forty years has been the large emigration of Mennonites from the former Soviet Union to Germany. Known as Aussiedler, they have often reconstituted congregational life, but have had continued difficulty with questions of identity. Some have seen their primary identity as Baptists, others as Mennonite Brethren or as a varied mix of the two. Some have organized into conferences, while others have remained independent.<sup>56</sup>

In Russia itself the prospects for a renewed church life within a denominational structure such as the Mennonite Brethren Conference appear dim. Most of the former leaders have left and it has become increasingly difficult to continue a structured congregational life. Perhaps, however, new life will emerge in unexpected

55 Heinrich Woelk and Gerhard Woelk, trans. Victor Doerksen *A Wilderness Journey: Glimpses of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia 1925-1980* (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1982), 133 ff.

56 For a brief overview see John N. Klassen, "Aussiedlergemeinden," in *Typisch Mennonitisch*, ed. Paul Warkentin and Diether Goetz-Lichdi (*Quelle des Lebens*, No. 3,4, Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Mennonitengemeinden in Deutschland und Bund der Europäischen Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinden, 1993), 41-46.



ways and in unexpected places. Many Mennonite Brethren and other Mennonites in the West have not forgotten their former homeland. They are focusing their efforts on broader segments of Russian society today through various Mennonite and other agencies. Other new life movements may emerge more indigenously but nevertheless may draw—consciously or unconsciously—from the deep wells of Mennonite Brethren spirituality nurtured for many years during better times.



## **Part II**

### **Lists, Tables, Maps**



## Chronological Listing of Mennonite Brethren Conventions in Russia 1872-1922

### Abbreviations for References

E	<i>Das Erntefeld</i>
F	P. M. Friesen, <i>The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia</i> (1789-1910)
FS	<i>Friedensstimme</i>
G	<i>Glaubensbekenntnis der Vereinigten Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinde in Russland</i>
HNI-HNVI	Diary of Hermann A. Neufeld, CMBS, Winnipeg
MR	<i>Mennonitische Rundschau</i>
RRD	Russia Related Documents, CMBS, Winnipeg
U	Heinrich Epp, <i>Abraham Unger, Gründer der "Einlager Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde"</i>
AHU	A. H. Unruh, <i>Die Geschichte der Mennoniten- Brüdergemeinde</i>
W	Diary of Johann Wieler, CMBS, Winnipeg
ZB	<i>Zionsbote</i>

Date	Location	References
1872, May 14-16 May 12?	Andreasfeld (Einlage)	F, 467, 475, 484, 514 W, 12f
1873	Klippenfeld, Molotschna	Wardin <sup>57</sup>
1874	Andreasfeld	F, 515, 522
1875	No record	
1876, May 16	Molotschna	F, 477, 491, 504f., 514, 520;
1877	Rückenau, Molotschna	F, 515f, U, 28

<sup>57</sup> See Albert W. Wardin, "Mennonite Brethren and German Baptists in Russia" in *Mennonites and Baptists: A Continuing Conversation*, ed. Paul Toews, Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought, no. 7 (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1993), 105. Wardin does not indicate the source of his information.

Date	Location	References
1878 - 1881	No record	
1882	Rückenau, Molotschna	F, 498f, 514, 1018, n. 296
1883, May 17-?	Friedensfeld 1883	F, 514; MR, July 15
1884	No record	
1885, Jan. 6?	Nikolaipol Yazikovo	HNI, 213
1886	Rückenau, Molotschna?	F, 523?
1887, May	Rückenau, Molotschna	HNI, 223
1888, May	Friedensfeld	HNI, 233
1889, May	Andreasfeld	HNI, 244; ZB, 12 Mar. 1890
1890, May 13-15	Rückenau, Molotschna	F, xxiii; HNI, 251; ZB, 6 Aug. 1890
1891	Sagradovka	HNI, 256
1892	Andreasfeld	HNI, 269
1893	Katlievka, Memrik	HNI, 294
1894	Friedensfeld	HNI, 304
1895	Rückenau, Molotschna	F, 525f, HNI, 309
1896	Andreasfeld	HNI, 317
1897	Friedensfeld	HNI, 324
1898	Sergeievka, Fürstenland	HNI, 358
1899	Annooka, Crimea	HNI, 406
1900, May 19 - ?	Vassilievka, Naumenko	G, 7; HNI, 406
1901	Tiege, Sagradovka	HNI, 430
1902	Kuban	HNI, 453



Date	Location	References
1903	Waldheim, Molotschna	F, 458, HNI, 496; ZB 6 Jan. 1904
1904, May 4-5	Reinfeld, Yazikovo	HNII, 17ff.
1905	Friedensfeld	HNII, 105
1906, May 29-30	Rückenau, Molotschna	F, xxx, HNII, 159; MR, 4 July 1906
1907, May 18-19 or May 24-27	Nikolaievka, Ignatievka	HNII, 159 200 FS, 2 June 2 1907; <i>Sendbote</i> , 9 Oct. 1907
1908, May	Katievka, Memrik	HNII, 241
1909, June ?	Petrovka, Naumenka (cancelled) Alexanderheim (unofficial)	F, 536, HNII, 257 FS, May 27, 1909
1910, May 14-15	Tiege, Sagrafovka	FS, May 22, 29; HNII, 290
1911, May 22 25 May May 27	Kuban (cancelled) Alexanderpol (unofficial) Nikolaievka, H. Neufeld home	FS, 12 Feb., 12 Mar. 29 May 1910 HNII, 339
1912, May 25-27	Rückenau, Molotschna	HNIII, 41; E, XII; RRD, 4,13,1
1913, May 17-18	Spat, Crimea HNIII, 125	FS, Jan. 16, Apr. 27;
1914, May 9-11	Millerovo	HNIII, 196ff.
1915-16	No conferences	
1917, May 28-29	Waldheim, Molotschna	Minutes, 1918; HNIV, 195
1918, Sept. 14-16	Vassilievka, Naumenkovo	AHU, 316-23; HNV, 91
1922, Sept.?	Katievka, Memrik?	HNVI, 537ff.

## Independent Congregations and their Affiliated Congregations in Russia in 1906

The names of the congregations appear according to the report published by Heinrich Braun; the memberships for the end of 1906 appear in parentheses.<sup>58</sup> Colony names follow as applicable. Alternative names for the congregation or the region may appear in parentheses. The "Map Location" provides the key to locating the congregation on maps that follow.

Congregation	Map Location
1. Einlage, Chortitza (47)	2
<i>Affiliated congregations:</i>	
2. Alexanderheim (67)	2
3. Andreasfeld (27)	2
4. Fürstenland (Sergeievka-Alexanderthal) (70)	2
5. Yazikovo (Nikolaipol) <sup>59</sup> (118)	2
6. Kronsthal, Chortitza (122)	2
7. Millerovo (No report)	2
8. Schönwiese, Chortitza (11)	2
9. Vasilevka (Naumenkovo, Petrovka) (163) (possessed its own seal)	2
10. Wiesenfeld (43)	2
11. Friedensfeld (85)	2
<i>Affiliated Congregations</i>	
12. Hebrew Colony (Judenplan) (61)	2

58 These membership statistics are taken from H. Braun, *Bundes-Statistic*: 1906. Several congregations did not report.

59 Friesen refers to it as "Jasykovo-Nikolaipol" (*Mennonite Brotherhood*, 535). Presumably the village of Nikolaipol was the Mennonite Brethren center in the colony. This Nikolaipol, however, needs to be distinguished from the congregation affiliated with the Memrik church, but located in the Donskaia district, and from the Nikolaipol congregation in Turkestan.

13. Miloradovka (41)	2
14. Nepluiev (Nepluievka) (103)	2
15. Steinfeld (Schlachting) (70)	2
16. Kamenka, Orenburg (288)	5
Kuban <sup>60</sup>	
17. Wohldemfürst (Velikokniashesk) (116)	3
18. Alexandrodar (78)	3
<i>Affiliated Congregation</i>	
19. Suvorovka (22)	3
20. Katliarevka, Memrik (413)	2
<i>Affiliated Congregations</i>	
21. Alexandropol <sup>61</sup> (65)	2
22. Kameschlack, Terek (5)	3
23. Masaievka <sup>62</sup> (42)	2
24. Nikolaipol <sup>63</sup> (27)	2
25. Steintal <sup>64</sup> (21)	2
26. Nikolaievka, Ignatievka (159)	2
27. Rückenau, Molotschna (511)	4
<i>Affiliated Congregations</i>	
28. Alexanderthal, Molotschna (96)	4

60 Most sources suggest that there was only one Mennonite Brethren Church in the Kuban, which was located in the village of Wohldemfürst (See C. P. Toews et al, *The Kuban Settlement* Winnipeg: CMBC Publications and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1989, 18). Braun, however lists separate statistics for the Kuban (which presumably refers to the Wohldemfürst congregation), for Alexandrodar, and for the affiliated congregation at Suvorovka.

61 Alexandropol belonged to Memrik, although it was closer to Ignatievka.

62 The exact location cannot be determined. The postal address, according to Friesen (*Mennonite Brotherhood*, 560), was Bolsche-Kreperskoe near Tagenrog.

63 The exact location cannot be determined. There were many villages named Nikolaipol, and many with similar names (e.g., Nikolaifeld, Nikolaievka). Friesen (*Mennonite Brotherhood*, 560) indicates that this congregation began in 1903, whereas Braun gives 1900 as the founding date. It was in the Donskaia district with postal address at Matveev-Kurgan.

64 Steintal was located approximately 4 kilometers from Cherebez. See *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 18 Mar. 1903, 5.

29. Gortschkovo, Ufa (325)	5
30. Grünberg <sup>65</sup> (Geiden) (No report)	2
31. Herzenberg (67)	2
32. Karagui, Orenburg (120) (possessed its own seal)	5
33. Lugovsk, Neu Samara (453)	5
34. Marienthal, Alt Samara (No report)	5
35. Puchtin <sup>66</sup> (Gnieden-Blumenheim) (No report)	2
36. Sparrau, Molotschna (38)	4
37. Talma, Terek (205)	3
38. Tiege, Molotschna (95)	4
39. Tiegengagen, Molotschna (55)	4
40. Tschunaievka (Tchernievka) (Western Siberia) (307) (possesses own seal)	1
41. Waldheim, Molotschna (199)	4
42. Spat (Crimea) (265)	2
43. Tiege, Sagradovka (379)	2
44. Nikolaipol (Turkestan) <sup>67</sup> (199)	1
45. Wymischle (Poland) (64)	1

65 Grünberg references could not be found elsewhere than in Braun's statistics. In the 1905 statistics Braun has "Geiden" in parentheses, whereas in the 1906 statistics Braun has "Gniden" in parentheses. Friesen (*Mennonite Brotherhood*, 528) refers to two congregations at Puchtin and Gnieden-Blumenheim. The first has a postal address at Gulaypole and the latter at Pakrovskoe. Earlier (499) he refers to two congregations at Puchtin and Gnieden-Blumenfeld. Puchtin and Gniden (Geiden?) could not be located on maps. There were two Blumenheims in the general area of the scattered Schönfeld colony, both not far from Gulaypole. See also "Gnieden-Blumenheim" in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

66 See note on Grünberg above.

67 This church was actually not a member of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, but regularly sent representatives to the annual conventions and participated in the mission work of the Conference.



# Statistical Summary of Mennonite Brethren Congregations in Russia in 1905<sup>1</sup>

Name of Regional Congregation	Increases by				Decreases by				Children's services												
	Elders	Ordained Ministers	Stations	Church Buildings	Members end of 1904	Baptisms	Transfer in	Readmissions	Total	Deaths	Transfer out	Excommunications	Withdrawal	Total	Members end of 1905	Total adherents	Choir members	No. of services	Leaders	Number of children	Financial contributions
Einlage	2	18	10	6	683	49	26	5	80	12	34	1	0	47	716	1973	189	18	41	536	3388
Friedensfeld	1	4	4	1	188	2	-	1	3	4	-	-	-	4	187	547	31	5	12	121	1963
Kamenka (Orenburg)	1	5	-	1	246	19	2	2	23	3	2	5	-	10	259	621	24	8	15	205	704
Kuban	2	3	2	1	229	8	1	2	11	3	19	2	-	17	223	602	20	2	14	160	1050
Mernik	1	9	5	2	465	54	11	-	65	4	7	3	-	14	516	1228	60	5	15	252	4624
Rueckenau	1	33	14	7	1641	92	50	7	149	24	25	11	-	60	1730	4050	343	35	49	1210	12833
Spat (Crimea)	1	8	4	3	321	5	2	1	8	4	20	3	1	28	301	845	40	8	13	240	2060 <sup>2</sup>
Tiege (Sagradovka)	1	11	2	1	383	31	2	-	33	6	19	1	-	26	390	935	150	8	6	150	1353
	10	91	41	22	4156	260	94	17	371	60	119	26	1	206	4322	10801	857	83	165	2874	25975

1 From Heinrich Braun, *Bundes-Statistik der Vereinigten, Taufgesinnten, Mennonitischen Brüder-Gemeinde in Russland*, 1905 (Niolaipol, 1906).

2 The Crimea congregation has also raised 3000 rubles for a church building fund.

# Statistical Summary of Mennonite Brethren Congregations in Russia in 1906<sup>1</sup>

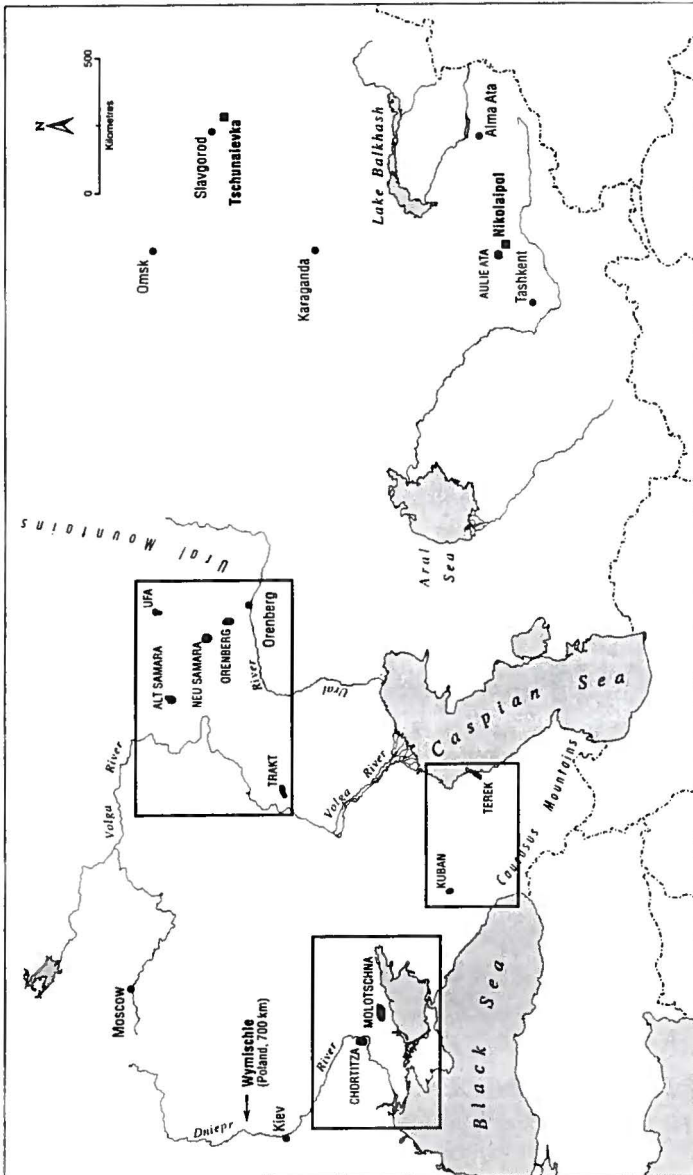
Name of Regional Congregation	Increases by				Decreases by				Children's services												
	Elders	Ordained Ministers	Stations	Church Buildings	Members end of 1904	Baptisms	Transfer in	Readmissions	Total	Deaths	Transfer out	Excommunications	Withdrawal	Total	Members end of 1906	Total adherents	Choir members	No. of services	Leaders	Number of children	Financial contributions
Einlage	2	18	9	6	636	55	35	1	91	16	39	4	-	59	668	1679	156	15	33	473	2145
Friedensfeld	1	8	4	1	344	35	-	-	35	6	11	2	-	19	360	1065	110	10	32	404	2676
Kamenka (Orenburg)	1	6	-	1	259	37	1	2	40	-	10	1	-	11	288	648	57	12	25	315	350
Kuban	2	2	2	1	223	4	-	2	6	3	6	4	-	13	216	609	20	2	12	180	1040
Memrik	1	9	5	2	516	44	65	1	110	5	41	6	1	53	573	1320	52	5	21	294	1841 <sup>2</sup>
Nikolaievka (Ignatov)	1	4	-	-	146	15	6	4	25	1	7	4	-	12	159	541	30	4	7	75	1200
Rueckenau	1	44	14	7	2326	244	111	5	360	32	175	6	2	215	2471	5677	379	33	71	1293	3301
Spat (Crimea)	1	7	4	3	301	10	-	-	10	3	43	-	-	46	265	772	40	8	12	245	1800
Tiege (Sagradovka)	1	11	4	1	390	10	7	3	20	5	21	5	-	31	379	942	50	2	4	120	1664
Turkestan	1	5	-	1	186	13	-	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	199	426	25	1	2	70	427
Wymyschle (Poland)	1	1	-	-	63	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	64	102	22	1	5	40	37
	13	115	42	23	5390	468	225	18	711	71	353	32	3	459	5642	13781	941	93	224	3509	16481

1 From Heinrich Braun, *Bundes-Statistik der Vereinigten, Taufgesinnten, Mennonitischen Brüder-Gemeinde in Russland*. 1905 (Niolaipol, 1906).

2 The Memrik congregation has raised 2061 rubles additionally for various causes.

# Maps of Mennonite Brethren Congregations in Russia, ca. 1905

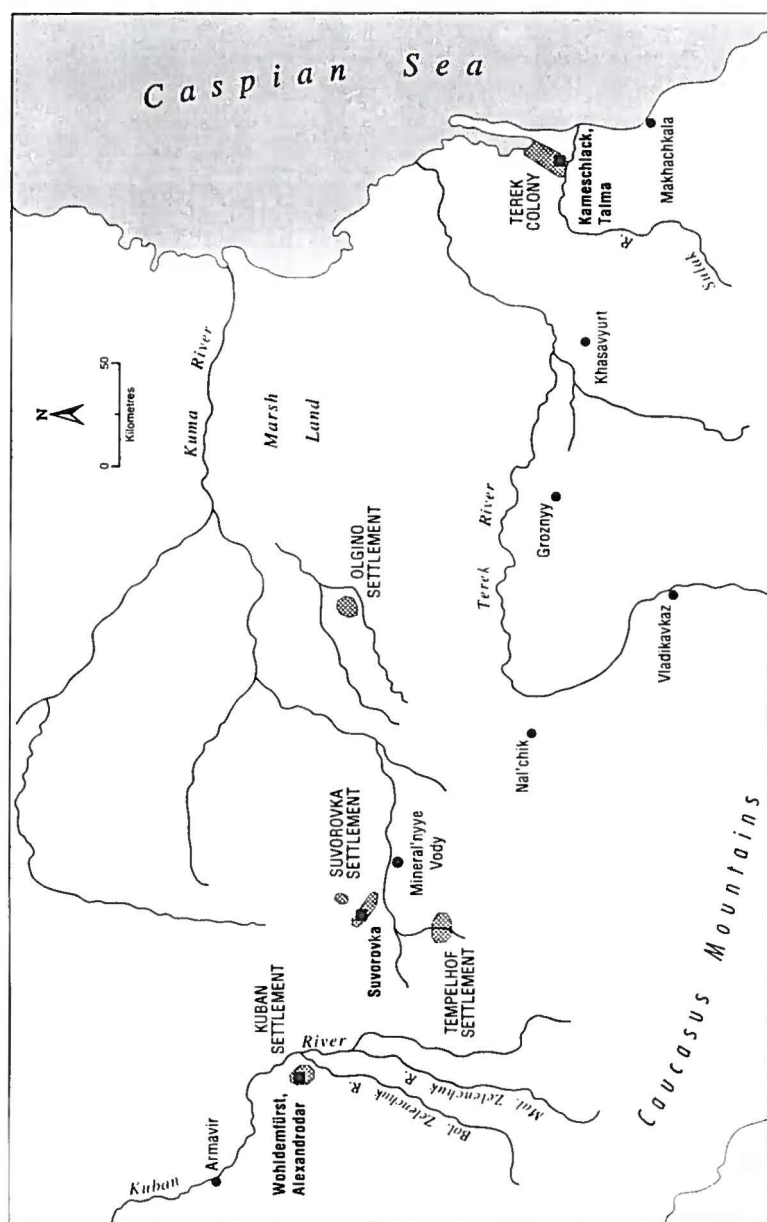
## 1. Congregations in Western and Central Russia



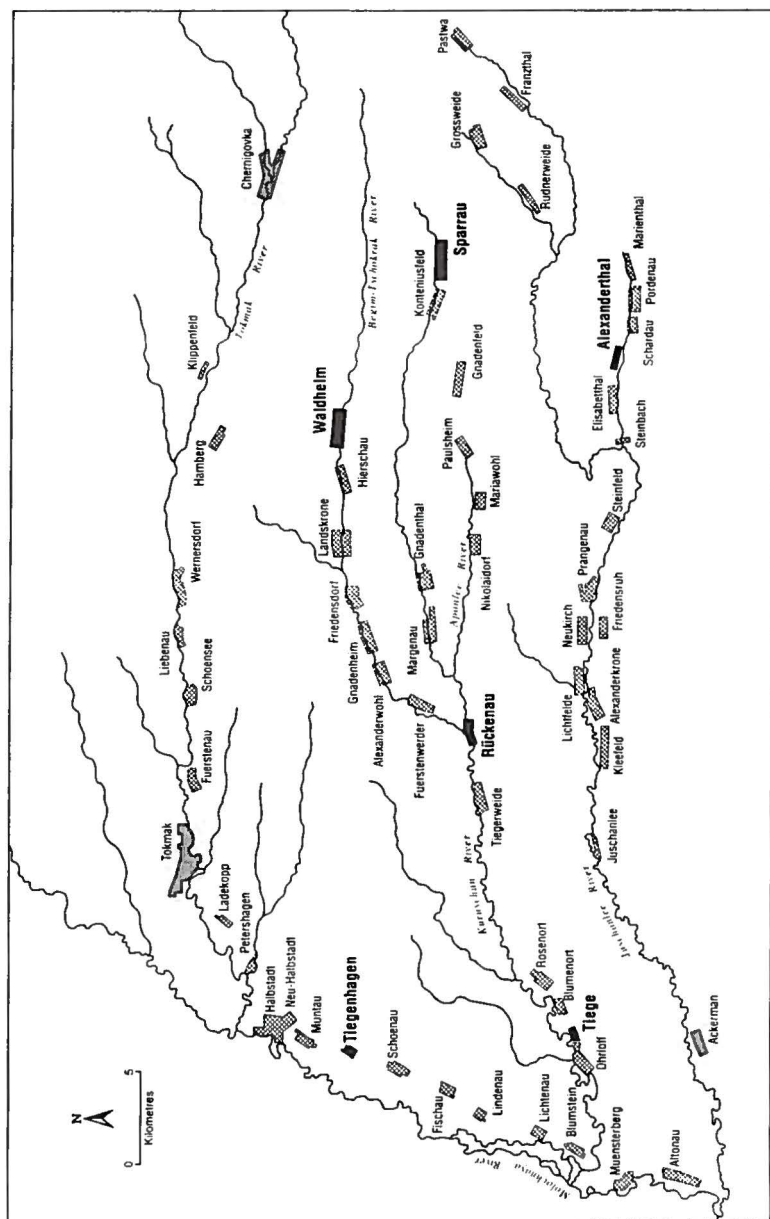




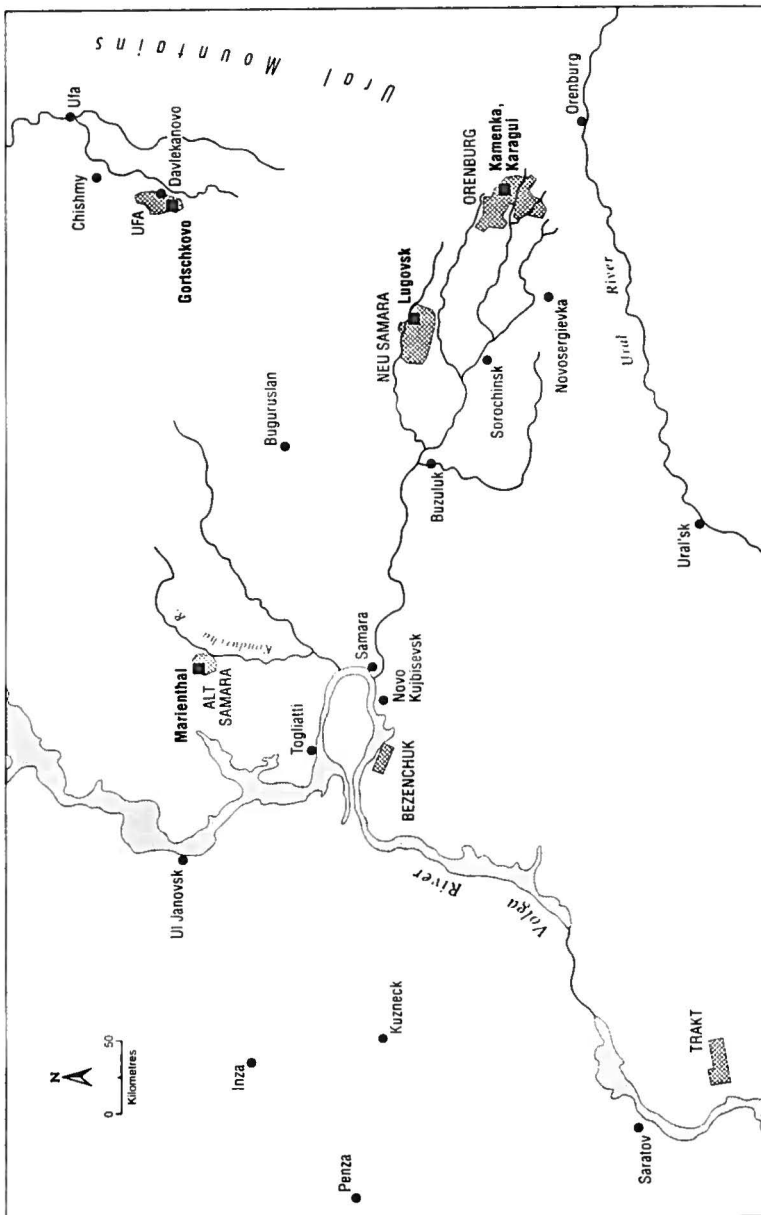
### 3. Congregations in the North Caucasus



## 4. Congregations in the Molotschna Colony



## 5. Congregations on the Volga River







## **Part III**

### **Minutes and Reports of Annual Conventions**



## Minutes of the Mennonite Brethren-Baptist Convention in Rückenau, May 21-23, 1882

*[The only known copies of the joint Baptist-Mennonite Brethren Conference of 1882 were published in several Russian journals. The translation below is drawn from two sources, each of which has a critical preface and footnotes and one of which also has some concluding comments. There are also some significant differences in the texts of the minutes themselves and each has sections omitted by the other. No attempt has been made to note which sections are derived from each of the two texts. The two versions may have resulted from independent translations from a German text, which may explain some differences between them.]*

### Introductory Comments by M. A. Kalnev<sup>68</sup>

First, it is necessary to say a few words about the following minutes of the Stundist conference. These minutes were found by chance during a police search of the elder of the Stavropol province (guberniia) Stundists, A. Storozhev. Storozhev was one of the outstanding leaders of Stundists in the Caucasus. He had extensive correspondence with many Stundists, even from frontier areas of Russia, and also communicated with a student of the St. Petersburg Technology Institute, Ivan Prokhanov. The police monitored this correspondence and a search of the Storozhev residence was performed by order of the authorities. As a result, a huge chest of books with obscene notes against the Orthodox Church written by Storozhev and a pile of his correspondence with Stundists were found. This indicates that Storozhev played an important role among the Stundists of the Northern Caucasus. The above-mentioned Prokhanov started publishing the Stundist periodical, *Beseda*, with advice as well as moral and financial support from the Germans. He appealed to Storozhev to help raise funds to buy a printing machine, which has already been purchased. The *Beseda* periodical (we have several issues) was published for four years

<sup>68</sup> M. A. Kalnev, ed., "The Germans and Stundobaptists: Regarding the Minutes of the Conference that took place on May 21-23, 1882 in the German Colony of Rückenau of Tavrida Gubernia," *Russkoe Renie* (1897, No. 4): 826-839.

in Russia, probably in the city of St. Petersburg. Presently it is published abroad and smuggled into Russia for distribution. An interesting and rare document, the minutes of the Stundist conference that took place on May 21-23, 1882 in the German colony of Rückenau of Tavrida guberniia, was found among Storozhev's voluminous correspondence. It is very rare because Stundists carefully conceal the minutes of their conferences. Although Stundist conferences take place every year, it is only the second time that they have published minutes of these meetings. Nikolaevskii, the professor of the Moscow Church Academy, published the only previously discovered minutes in the periodical *Strannik* in September 1892.

### **Introductory Comments by V. Skvortzov<sup>69</sup>**

The Stundobaptist sect's mission is a very organized system used to spread their false teachings among the Orthodox and other peoples of Russia. The German Baptists gave rise to this organization, the so-called newest sectarianism. It was modeled after the foreign Protestant missions; therefore the Stundobaptist mission should be called to the attention of leaders of the Orthodox mission, who are currently struggling with the new sects.

As already known, the remarkable feature of Stundobaptism is its passionate proselytism, which characterizes the sect as a whole, as well as every member. The Russian Orthodox religion believes that they achieve salvation through devotion to the church—praying for hours at a time, making vows to do good deeds, journeying to holy places, etc. The Stundobaptist teachings declare that men will be saved by faith alone, with no need for acts of kindness or devotion to the Church. A person converted from Orthodoxy to Stundobaptism feels that faith is not enough. Feeling that he has to do more he spreads the false teachings of his sect to others who have not grasped the true meaning of Christian faith. Therefore, while leading countless others into the same abyss of lies, these poor unfortunate ones fall into sin and reject the Church.

This passionate spreading of the sect's teachings is the main moral virtue of Stundobaptism. Every Stundobaptist, especially a newly converted one, in order to win respect from an authorized member of the community, passionately spreads the false teachings of his new reli-

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69 V. Skvortzov, ed., "The Organization of the Stundobaptist Mission and the Minutes of One Sectarian Conference," in *Missionerskoe obozrenie* (September 1900): 209-225.



gion among people close to him, such as family members, neighbors, his townspeople, etc. The main incentive for proselytes to join is that otherwise newcomers are not admitted to the so-called cup and the participation in the meetings of the actual members of the sect (i.e., administrative and business meetings where they read and write messages to and from other Stundobaptists, discuss church matters, sort out brothers' offenses, and discuss new ways of conducting propaganda). Dissemination of the sect's false teachings happens everywhere and at all times—every time a member of the sect meets an Orthodox person, be it accidental or deliberate, at home or in the fields, at work or at meetings. A Stundobaptist absolutely cannot have a conversation without praising his new faith or criticizing the Orthodox church.

The German Stundobaptists perfectly understood and took advantage of this quality in their Russian followers. They united the efforts of single members into a system and a missionary organization. The guidance of the Russian Stundobaptists by German propagandists in disseminating the sect's false teachings became unusually noticeable since the penetration of German neobaptism of Oncken into Russia.

The standard arrangement of the Stundobaptist mission is as follows. Every one of the sect's communities must have its own evangelist who is well read in the Holy Bible and is good with words. This man may live in the community as a tailor, a shoemaker, or a miller. He teaches and encourages other members of the sect in disseminating false teachings, supplying them with Bibles in which he underlines the necessary parts, and other booklets. He receives these from the elder evangelist, with whom he communicates by mail and in person. Evangelists are usually appointed elders and deacons of the sect. Next are the special missionaries of the sect, who sometimes manage vast areas consisting of many communities. The missionaries are the live connection between the communities and their preachers, carriers of the news concerning the sect and instructors of the local evangelists, moral censors of the community and judges of the people who go against the laws of the sect. They have the final say about which members deserve rebaptizing and which should be excommunicated. The missionaries have the rights of the elders. When visiting the sect's communities they lead the business meetings, direct the elections for the positions of the false deacons and false elders. The active members vote for a few candidates and the one with the most

votes is chosen. The elder and other members of the community later ordain him. The missionaries also make up the tests or exams on the knowledge of the Holy Bible and the laws of the Stundobaptist sect for those who are about to be rebaptized. They also, with the false elder or false deacon of the community (many communities are headed only by deacons), conduct the ritual of rebaptizing, which takes place during the night in a river or pond, in a faraway hidden place. Missionaries also collect money from the local treasurers, which they pass on to the missionary fund and sometimes donate to the poor.

A Stundobaptist missionary committee, which includes members from the Russian and the German sects, unites the traveling Stundobaptist evangelists of the separate congregations in their propagandistic activity. The Germans always dominate and sway the committee. This committee controls the missionary fund, which consists of donations made during the meetings and donations from people interested in Russia's newest sectarianism. More generous donations usually come from Germans and from our aristocratic Pashkovites, intelligentsia involved with sects and from American Quakers. The missionary fund is one of the most important weapons for propaganda to spread the false teachings of the Stundobaptist sect. The missionary fund also supports the evangelists. It is also used, under the pretense of charity, as bait for poor people who join the sect in the hope of improving their economic situation. Rumors among the people that poor peasants, once they convert to Stundobaptism, become richer undoubtedly have some truth to them.

The highest body in the management of Stundobaptist mission is the meetings or conferences of the chief representatives of the sect's communities and evangelists. These meetings must take place every year. They are used mainly to discuss missionaries' questions about the successful spreading of the false teachings of the sect and to solve disputes and perplexities about faith and the sect's discipline. These meetings play an enormous role in the history of the growth and acceptance of the newest sect. Several exact copies of the original minutes of Stundobaptist meetings are at the disposal of the editors. These documents are undoubtedly important to the sect, as shown by the minutes below.<sup>70</sup>

70 These are published in unaltered form with all the grammatical and stylistic errors.

The delegates arrived at the conference in Rückenau on May 20, 1882.

The Russian and German brothers who arrived at the conference agreed to keep the advice and opinions short but clear, in order to finish everything during the following two days, May 21 and 22.

Members of the conference:

The following delegates from their congregations attended the meeting:

Brothers from the Molotschna<sup>71</sup> Church: David Schellenberg<sup>72</sup>, Johann Fast, Franz Nickel<sup>73</sup>, Wilhelm Löwen, Klaus Ens, Johann Wieler<sup>74</sup>, Heinrich Köhn, Heinrich Löwen, Isaac Neufeld, Peter Martinovitch Friesen<sup>75</sup>, David Block, Johann Hiebert, Peter Böse and Heinrich Funk.

Brothers from Herzenberg: Jacob Derksen and Johann Kliewer. Brothers from Puchtin: Johann Heinrichs and Jacob Wiens (twenty brothers).

Brothers from the Einlage Church: Aaron Lepp, Johann Siemens, Johann Friesen<sup>76</sup>, Peter Peters, Dietrich Klaassen, Johann Hiebert, Benjamin Redekop, Martin Koslowsky, Kornelius Fehr, Jacob Koslowsky<sup>77</sup>, Peter Friesen, Peter Harder, Jacob Krause, Wilhelm Riegel, Gerhard Wiebe and Gerhard Siemens (sixteen brothers).

Brothers from Wiesenfeld: Jacob Reimer<sup>78</sup>, Jacob Wiens and Kornelius Reimer (three brothers).

71 The Molotschna church, which gets its name from the Molotchnaya river, is located in Berdiansk district, Tavrida guberniia (main colonies Rückenau and Halbstadt); the Einlage and Friedensfeld churches are in Ekaterinoslav guberniia (main colonies Einlage and Friedensfeld); the Don Church is in Don region; the Kuban church is in Kuban region.

72 David Schellenberg is a Baptist elder from Rückenau. He is very respected among his fellow Stundobaptists.

73 F. Nickel at present is an itinerant minister in the town of Inovratslav (Posnan) in the Prussian brotherhood of the German Baptist Union.

74 J. Wieler was a Chortitz colonist who lived in Blumstein near Halbstadt in 1880. He was the chairman of the missionary committee of the Baptist Union in Russia in 1880. He was one of the main leaders of Stundobaptist propaganda and an organizer in the Stundobaptist sect until 1885, when he escaped to Romania. He lived there until his death (in 1893) in the town of Tulcea.

75 P. M. Friesen, elder of Odessa Baptist community, received a specialized education in the Hamburg Baptist Missionary Seminary.

76 J. Friesen from the colony of Einlage was a treasurer of the Baptist Union in Russia in 1881-82. Afterwards he lived in Odessa. His son, also Johann, moved to North America in 1892, where he was a minister in Hillsboro (Kansas) and is now taking a special course in the Rochester (New York) Baptist Missionary Seminary.

77 J. Koslowsky is a member of the Hamburg Baptist Tract Society.

78 J. Reimer is a missionary related to a Tiflis Baptist merchant, Kalveit (he is now under police observation in Yerivan).



Brothers from Friedensfeld Church: Jacob Janz, Benjamin Janz, Bernard Dyck, Martin Thielman, Franz Peters, and Heinrich Wilems.

Brothers from Sagradovka: Jakob Richert, Paul Peters, Jacob Berg, Klaus Kröker and Jacob Regier.

Brothers from Sergievka: Peter Fast and Peter Neufeldt (thirteen brothers).

Brothers from the Don Church: Johann Voth, Eduard Wölk, Theodor Friching, Karl Voth, Wilhelm Bechthold, Heinrich Lidke, and Bartholomew Kiynast (seven brothers).

Brothers from the Kuban Church: Christian Schmidt, Jacob Görtz and Alexander Storozhev<sup>79</sup> (three brothers) as well as the guests, Brother Christian Fisher<sup>80</sup> and a Russian missionary, Jacob Dilyakov<sup>81</sup>. Including those two the total of German brothers is sixty-four.

Brothers from the Russian Churches:

From Novo-Vasilievka: Andrey Ananyevich Stoyalov, Vasily Romanovich Kolodin, and Mitrofan Savelyevich Cheremisin.

From Astrakhanka: Minai Prokofyevich Chanin, Justin Leontievich Matveev.

From Vladicavcaz: Egor Maksimovich Bogdanov<sup>82</sup>, Ivan Nikitich Skorokhodov<sup>83</sup>.

From Tiflis: Andrew Markovich Mazaev<sup>84</sup>.

From Osnova (Kherson Guberniia, Odessa district): Michael Timofeevich Ratushny.

From Ignatievka (Kherson Guberniia, Odessa district): Alexander Simenovich Kapustian.

From Poltavka (Kherson Guberniia): Gregory Timofeevitch Kushnerenko<sup>85</sup>.

From Mairovka (Kherson Guberniia): Jacob Feodorovich Didulov.

79 A. A. Storozhev, one of the Old Believers, lives in the colony of Wohldemfürst. He is one of the most outstanding propagandists of the sect.

80 C. Fisher, a citizen of the colony of Vandau in Kherson guberniia, is an outstanding propagandist in southern Russia and Northern Caucasus.

81 J. Delyakov is a Persian citizen. He is an evangelist and started the Stundo-evangelical sect in southern Russia. He contributed greatly to the propaganda of Stundobaptism, Pashkovism, and Baptism.

82 E. M. Bogdanov has been under the observation of police in the town of Lodzi, Petrokovsk guberniia since 1890.

83 I. N. Skorokhodov died in 1892.

84 A. M. Mazaev has been under observation in the town of Kuba, Baku guberniia since 1891.

85 G. T. Kushnerenko and J. K. Sarana are now representatives of the Baptist community in the village of Nikolskoe, Stavropol guberniia.



From Karlovka (Elizavetgrad district): Trifon Osipovich Khlistun<sup>86</sup>.

From Lyubomirovka (Elizavetgrad district): Ivan Ryaboshapka<sup>87</sup> and Peter Griva.

From Einlage: Paul Petrovich Peretyatkin.

From Lidiyafeldt: Jacob Korneevich Saranov.

From Chichma (Bessarabian guberniia): Arhkip Ivanovich Romanenko (eighteen brothers).

The conference began on May 21 at 8:00 a.m. with the reading of Phillipians 2:1-12, the singing of hymns, and prayer.

## I. Concerning Missions

By request of the German brothers, the Russian brotherhood<sup>88</sup> agreed that during the conference sessions they would only discuss the mission among the Russians and would not ask the German brothers for a translation when they discussed and deliberated about the mission among the Germans. This was done in order not to interrupt the conference and to discuss all the issues scheduled during the conference.

Later provisions were made for missionaries and ministers to give their reports clearly and distinctly, concerning where they worked for the Lord, in order to prompt the brotherhood to help spread the gospel of Christ among the sinners [i.e., the Orthodox<sup>89</sup>].

## II. Missionaries' Reports

Brother Johann Fast<sup>90</sup> gave a report about his activities in Molotschna in the colonies of German Mennonites, where in one year sixty-one people have joined the Molotschna Church.

Brother Franz Nickel gave a report about his activities on the

86 T. O. Khlistun has been under observation of police on Caucasus in the town of Geryus, Elisavetpol guberniia since 1891.

87 I. Ryaboshapka was the leader of Kherson Stundobaptists in Caucasus in 1893. He was under the observation of police.

88 Seventeen Russians and fifty-five German brothers attended the conference, according to Popov, *Tserkovnii vestnik*, 31, 1892.

89 You can imagine how clear and distinct the reports of the Germans were. They don't speak Russian at all although they were born and grew old in Russia. Lack of the knowledge of Russian among the German colonists, especially women, is common in southern guberniias. For example, in the Kherson guberniia we personally observed this while teaching in German at the colony schools.

90 According to Rubashevskii, J. Fast has a great deal of authority not only with Baptists, but also with Pashkovites. Fast was exiled from St. Petersburg to Simferopol because he was guilty of spreading propaganda. According to the magazine *Beseda*, he founded a school at the place of exile in order to propagandize, but the school was closed by the authorities.

Don, Kuban and in Stavropol. He discerned a crucial need to continue his work there.

**Brother Jakob Siemens** gave a report about his activities. He visited people in different places and explained the essential and true duties of Christians to them. These duties are not revealed in the laws of the people, but in Christ's commandments. He had a conversation with a Jew and visited a Catholic Church.

**Brother Jacob Janzen**, the elder of Friedensfeld Church, said that in Friedensfeld and Sagraodovka forty-eight people had joined the church through baptism in one year.

**Brother Aaron Lepp**, the elder of the Einlage Church, reported that in the course of one year forty-four people have joined.

**Brother Theodor Frikhtin** (an elder?) of the Don Church gave a report about his activities on the Don, where fifty people have joined the church through baptism.

**Brother Christian Schmidt**, the elder of Kuban Church, said that he learned it is best to move the missionaries from one place to another in order to spread the gospel of Christ. In one year, eleven people have joined the Kuban Church through baptism.

**Brother Egor Bogdanov**<sup>91</sup> from Vladikavkaz told the conference that while there are no funds for missionaries in Vladikavkaz, he visited the town of Mozdok using his own means. In Mozdok he had a public debate about religion with a missionary from the Orthodox Church. He also visited two villages with enormous success, especially the village of Pavlodar, where he baptized several people. Later, with Brother N. Voronin,<sup>92</sup> he went to Tavrida guberniia where he was widely accepted in the villages of Novo-Vasilievka and Astrakhan. On the way home he stopped in Pavlodar and later went back to Novovasilyevka and Astrakhan, where he has lived since Easter. He baptized seventy-eight people altogether. Another three people were accepted as members, but not baptized.

**Brother Gregory Kushnerenko** from the village of Bashtanka of Kherson guberniia said that he had a conversation with a printer who apparently was close to accepting the evangelical faith. He also said that at the Muzychin estates near the town of Kherson there are some brothers who have joined, but they are still unsure about eating meat.

91 One of the prominent leaders of the Baptists in the Caucasus.

92 A rich merchant from Tiflis who changed his faith to the Baptists because of the German named Kalveit. He was one of the first Russians in the Caucasus to convert to the Baptists (from the Molokan sect). He played a great role in spreading Stundobaptism in the Caucasus. This outstanding propagandist was under the observation of the police in the city of Orenburg from 1887 to 1891.

They are from the Khlysty sect, which considers eating meat to be a sin. There are also some brothers in Bulatselova and Ingulka who are in complete agreement with all the believers. He also stated that he visited brothers in Friedensfeld, Kichkas and Yakovlevo. In Kherson guberniia he met some Molokans who follow Tambov Molokan teachings. They are similar to Molokans from Tavrida. Their group consists of eighty-five people.

**Brother Michael Ratushny**, the elder of Osnova village in Odessa district of Kherson guberniia, told the conference that he had visited many nearby places, where brothers disagree on many petty subjects. He sees a serious need to visit them more often, in order to unite them. He also visited brothers in Bessarabia guberniia and last year in Kiev guberniia. Later he reported that in the village of Osnova, Ignatovka and the surrounding areas there are 120 Baptists. He also reported that the donations to the mission are very small; in two years only sixty rubles were collected.

**Brother Trifon Khlistun**<sup>93</sup>, the elder of the village Karlovka in Elizavetgrad district of Kherson guberniia, told the conference that there are about seventy brothers in their area. There are some disagreements in the brotherhood, but they are very united. While donations to the mission are not very large, they are adequate. Presently they have about forty rubles. Later he said that there were ten baptisms this month.

**Brother Paul Peretyatkin**, a deputy of Kichkas (Einlage) and Kushchevskaya brotherhoods of Ekaterinoslav guberniia, told the conference that their brothers disagree about donations to the mission. Some brothers refuse to donate anything.

**Brother Jacob Sarapa**, a deputy from the same brotherhood, concurred with this claim. The brotherhood consists of twenty-five people.

**Brother Andrew Mazaev**<sup>94</sup>, the deacon of Tiflis community, told the conference that **Brother V. Pavlov**<sup>95</sup>, their elder, visited some places

<sup>93</sup> He was exiled to the town of Elizavetpol because he was accused of spreading propaganda. Now he lives about seventy versts from Elizavetpol.

<sup>94</sup> He is a well-known rich sheep-breeder in the Northern Caucasus. Now he is an elder.

<sup>95</sup> V. G. Pavlov, an inhabitant of Tiflis, converted from Molokanism to Stundobaptism through the influence of Voronin in 1870. Thanks to obvious abilities, he received a special education in the Hamburg Missionary Seminary from 1873-76. On receiving ordination into the Baptist ministry in Hamburg, he became one of the most prominent figures of the Stundist sect in Russia. He was and apparently now is an agent on the salary of the American Missionary Committee in Hamburg. He has resided in Orenburg, Tiflis, and recently in Tulcea where he publishes a journal in the German language.



in the Caucasus at the brotherhood's expense. He apparently had some success. Unfortunately he could not tell the exact number of people baptized by V. Pavlov, since he doesn't have this information. Also, two French teachers<sup>96</sup> have joined the church in Tiflis.

**Brother Christian Fisher**, the missionary, told the conference that he visited the colonies in Samara guberniia where he was arrested. The Molokans asked him for an explanation of the Lord's will, but he could not provide one because he did not speak Russian. He also visited the meetings of Molokans in Saratov guberniia, where he discovered that the people were eager to be edified by the Word of the Lord. He also noted that it would have been better for the people if there had been a Russian missionary instead. He also visited the German colonies with a sermon, but when the people found out that he was Baptist, they refused to listen to him and would not receive him. He had to return home.

### **III. Concerning the Appointment of Brothers as Missionaries**

Both the Russian and German brothers agreed that it was best to send two missionaries to preach the gospel for a few days in one place, instead of having only one or two sermons and leaving before satisfying the needs of people. It also would be more comfortable for two missionaries. When one of them was tired, the second could continue the sermon. Singing also would be easier. This proposition was accepted.

**Brother Peter M. Friesen**<sup>97</sup> proposed that to make things easier for the Brotherhood, one of them should volunteer to be a missionary. Obviously, this should be the decision of the brother and he must have the means to do this. If the brother did not have the means to volunteer, the mission would pay for his expenses. In extreme circumstances, the mission should send two missionaries, whom it would fully pay. The Lord's work should not cease because of the money

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96 Emma and Laura Zhako, born in Switzerland, both originally belonged to the so-called "free church." Afterward Emma Zhako joined the Darbyist sect and in Holland converted to the Baptists. Laura Zhako became a Baptist in England. They both were accepted into the Tiflis Baptist community in the beginning of 1882.

In one of his letters Storozhev himself takes credit for converting those teachers. One of the teachers recently lived in Batum.

97 The minister of the evangelical congregation in Odessa. He has much influence over the Kherson Stundists. Rubashevskii said that Friesen is well known everywhere. Recently he became cautious, although earlier he was very bold. This caution is the result of vigilant surveillance by the mayor of Odessa over his activities.

shortages. The conference accepted this proposition. However, situations should not occur in which one missionary arrives before the other has even left, while other places remained unvisited. It was suggested that each missionary be assigned an area in which to preach.

**Brother Jacob Görtzen**, the deputy from Kuban, told the conference about a serious need to send a Russian missionary to the Cossack towns on the outskirts of Wohldemfürst. Apparently some Cossacks have asked for this. They explain that they need to know the truth.

**Brother A. Storozhev**<sup>98</sup> said that in Bogoslovka village, there are two families who agree with the teachings of the gospel and seem to like the brotherhood. He also had heard from Brother Fisher that some people<sup>99</sup> in Stavropol, who belong to the Khlystov sect, have abandoned their false beliefs and are starting to accept baptism.

At this point it was noon, and after a prayer the conference recessed for lunch. At two o'clock the conference resumed.

**Brother Ivan Ryaboshapka**<sup>100</sup>, the elder of Lyubumirka village of Kherson guberniia, Elisavetgrad region, told the conference that for a long time people were persecuted and heavily fined if they went to divine service. For the last two years, however, nothing has happened and people are no longer afraid to go to divine service. In Kamenets-Podolsk guberniia, not far from the city of Balta, there are some believers. Twelve of them came to Lyubumirka and were baptized. Apparently they suffered greatly from their neighbors. They were beaten up during one of their meetings. One brother's foot and another brother's hand were cut with a knife.<sup>101</sup> In Lyubumirka itself twelve people were baptized.

He also stated that he visited Kiev guberniia, where there were about one hundred baptized people. Some brothers do wrong things, and because almost everyone participates in this, there is nobody to warn or admonish them. Our brothers should pay attention to the problems of the Kiev brothers and teach them.

98 In 1884 Storozhev lived in the farm estate of brothers Kalmykov, rich sheep-breeders in Stavropol guberniia, near the village of Sotnikovo.

99 Former members of Khlystov sect of the villages of Spitseвка, Michailovskoe and Pelagiada have left the sect about eight years ago (in 1889) for the sect of Sabbatarian Baptists.

100 One of the first leaders of the sect. He was exiled to the Caucasus (probably to Yerevan) because he was accused of waging propaganda and forging documents.

101 Those events in Ryaboshapka's report are hardly true. Stundobaptists have a remarkable ability to make a mountain out of a molehill especially to their elders to give the impression that they are suffering so that they can receive funds from the mission.



**Brother Johann Wieler**<sup>102</sup> told the conference that in Samara guberniia there are some Mennonites, who offered five hundred rubles a year to a brother who could come and teach the Tatars. Brother A. Mazaev suggested that Brother Pavlov could do it, since he knows the Tatar dialect.

Members of the conference replied that first they must talk to Brother Pavlov and see if he wants to go on this mission.

#### **IV. Concerning Salaries of Missionaries**

**Brother Aaron Lenk** proposed to the conference that the salaries for the missionaries should be as follows:

Annual salary—450 rubles and the missionary is expected to work for eight months;

Semi-annual salary—175 rubles and he is expected to work for four months;

Four-month term salary—75 rubles and he is expected to work for two months.

**Brother David Schellenberg** suggested that, besides an annual salary of 450 rubles, a missionary should receive fifty rubles housing allowance. At the end of the term, depending on how hard he has worked, he could receive a bonus. The conference fully agreed with this suggestion.

**Brother Karl Reimer**<sup>103</sup> told the conference that 175 rubles should be enough for four months of preaching. The conference agreed with this proposal.

**Brother Jacob Janzen** told the conference that seventy-five rubles should be enough for two months of preaching. The conference agreed with this proposal.

#### **V. The election of missionaries**

The conference elected Brother Johann Fast to be a missionary in Molotschna for a one-year term and Brother F. Nickel for a six-month term with a salary of 175 rubles. Another 175 rubles were reserved in order for the Molotschna church to appoint another missionary.

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102 J. Wieler, according to Bishop Alexei Dorodnitsin, is a resident at a farm estate in Chortitza in Ekaterinoslav guberniia. Wieler is a fairly wealthy man who owns a share of a paint store in Odessa. He turned over his business to his partner Vinchi and devoted himself to preaching neobaptism (Stundism). According to Friesen, J. Wieler died in Tulcea, Romania.

103 Rubashevsky reports that Reimer was from Hamburg. In 1893 he was in Petersburg, Kiev, Kharkov, Elisavetpol, Tiflis and other places, securing large donations for propaganda.

The conference elected Brothers I. Siemens and N. Peters to be missionaries in the Einlage church of Ekaterinoslav guberniia for a semi-annual term with a salary of 175 rubles each and four months of service. Brother Neufeld receives 200 rubles for four months of service. Brother Peters receives 75 rubles for two months of service.

The conference elected Brother Johann Voth<sup>104</sup> to be a missionary for four months on the Don with a salary of 175 rubles. The conference also decided that two other brothers should visit the Don colonies.

Brothers from Sergievka (located on the Dnieper River) suggested to the conference that missionaries from Molotschna, Einlage and Friedensfeld churches should arrange to come to Sergievka in turn. Brothers in Sergievka then could be edified in their faith. The conference promised to do this.

The conference reserved 175 rubles in order for the Kuban church to appoint a missionary for a four-month service, so that the Kuban missionary could visit brothers in Molotschna and vice versa.

Brother Peter M. Friesen suggested that the conference elect Brother Pavlov as a missionary for a one-year term. He is expected to spend four months in Tavrida guberniia and other places and four months in the Caucasus. The conference supported this suggestion.

Brother A. Storozhev suggested that the conference appoint Russian Brothers I. Ryaboshapka, Michael Ratushny, and Gregory Kushnerenko for four-month terms with a salary of 175 rubles each. They are supposed to visit their brotherhoods in turn. The conference agreed with this proposition.

Brother Egor Bogdanov from Vladikakaz told the conference that there is disagreement between him and Brother Vasilii Pavlov from Tiflis about the celebration of the seventh day of the week. Brother Pavlov insists that it should be celebrated from midnight to midnight, while the Bible states that the seventh day should be celebrated from evening to evening.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, before appointing Brother Pavlov as a missionary, the conference should tell him not to spread something that is not written in the Bible.

104 J. Voth probably left for the United States five years ago in 1892.

105 Celebrating Sunday from evening to evening has remained among Caucasus Baptists from the Molokan sect, which received it from Judaism. It is one of the main differences between Molokan Baptists and Mennonite Baptists, Stundobaptists, etc. Since Pavlov followed the German Baptists, he rejected that tradition and tried to introduce the Caucasus Baptists to the traditions of celebrating Sunday from midnight to midnight.

The conference decided to write to Brother Vasilii Pavlov that he should not encourage people to celebrate from midnight to midnight. Instead the people should decide when to celebrate and the brotherhood should not make a big issue out of this. The conference will also ask Brother V. Pavlov to spread the decision of the conference to all the Caucasus brotherhood.

**Brother I. Ryaboshapka** suggested that if Russian missionaries want to visit the Ukrainians and vice versa they should not be refused. This proposition was accepted.

At 7:00 p.m. the conference was adjourned until morning.

On May 22 at 7:00 a.m. it resumed with singing, reading from the Scriptures and prayer.

**Brother Martin Thielman** read the minutes of the previous day's meeting written in German.

**Brother I. Friesen**, the treasurer, read the report to the conference: how much money remained from the previous conference, how much money was received from churches, how much money the missionaries received for their salaries and other expenses, and how much money remained in total. After this he resigned.

## **VI. The election of committee members, treasurer and chairman**

Brother Johann Wieler was appointed the new chairman of the committee. Brother Ivan Nickel Hiebert from Blumstein #7 became the new treasurer.

**Brother Ivan Skorokhodov** proposed to the conference that each community should elect one person among them to become a member of the committee to keep order in the mission. The following people were elected:

Brother Andrew Markovich Mazaev for the Tiflis community;

Brother Ivan Nikitich Skorokhodov for Vladikavkaz;

Brother Joseph Grigorevich Sergeev for the Nova-Vasilievka community;

Brother Minai Prokofevich Khanin for the Astrakhan community;

Brother Alexander Kapustin for the Osnova community of Odessa district;

Jacob Andreevich Saranov for the village of Andreasfeld in the Alexander district, Ekaterinoslav guberniia;

Evstaphii Trifonovich Kushnerenko for the Poltava community of Kherson guberniia;



Ivan Akima Rybalka for the Lyubomirovka community of Elisavetgrad district;

Triphon I. Khlystun for the Karlovka community of Elisavetograd district;

The minutes then were read to the Russian deputies and accepted.

## VII. Concerning the Gift of Healing

Brother J. Wieler made a suggestion about healing with prayer and anointing with holy oil. This is mentioned in the Gospel according to Mark 6:13 and James 5:14-15. Should we follow this in treating the ill?

Brother E. Bogdanov answered that those words are advice, not a commandment. If the sick person wishes this to be done, then we should respect his wishes. It should be done with strong faith and passionate prayer. During the prayer for the sick person one should express one's obedience to the Lord. If the sick person is healed it will be God's doing; should he not be healed, it will also be His will. So our Saviour prayed saying: "Not my will, but your will be done."

A few brothers had witnessed cases where a person was healed by prayer and anointing with holy oil.

The conference decided that each community should respect the wishes of the sick person, whether he wished to summon the Lord only by prayer or with prayer and anointing with holy oil.

## VIII. Concerning those who are not baptized by faith but, according to the common custom, as infants

Brother Johann Wieler informed the conference as follows: The brotherhood from Petersburg told him that Brother Vasilii Pashkov<sup>106</sup> wishes our Baptists brothers to invite Petersburg brothers to Holy Communion, although they were not baptized by faith like our brothers. The Petersburg brothers believe that the baptism they received as children is valid.

Brother Egor Bogdanov replied that if we allow those who were baptized as children to come to Holy Communion then we should agree that baptism of infants is valid.

Brother Andrew Mazaev argued that the New Testament clearly states that a person who has faith and is baptized will be saved. Therefore, without faith baptism has no meaning. Because of this we can-

<sup>106</sup> V. A. Pashkov, a retired lieutenant-colonel, is one of the most active followers of the false teachings of Lord Grenville Radstock. These people are known as "Pashkovites" in Russia.

not invite such a person to Holy Communion.

**Brother Ivan N. Skorokhodov** stated that if we allow these people to come to the Holy Communion, would we not be agreeing that infant baptism is valid? We would be saying that baptism during childhood is right. Therefore, we would be saying that they were right and we were wrong. Why did Brother Pashkov and his brothers separate from the Orthodox Church if the Orthodox way of baptizing is right? Therefore, those baptized in the right way have the right to Holy Communion.

**Brother Fisher** suggested that the conference should tell Brother Pashkov that it is unable to solve the problem. This discussion should be postponed so that both sides can better understand how to deal with it according to God's will.

**Brother Christian Schmidt** stated that allowing those people to come to Holy Communion would endorse the baptism of infants. This is against the teachings of apostles, which say that only those who believe should be baptized.

**Brother Jacob Janzen** suggested to the conference that it table this problem, to avoid sharp dispute until it is resolved one way or another later.

The conference accepted this suggestion to postpone a decision until later.

**Brother Peter Peretyakin** from Einlage suggested that the conference should help with the reconstruction of the prayer house on which he spent much of his own money. The conference decided to give fifty rubles to the brothers in Einlage for the church.

### **Conclusion of the Conference**

The members of the conference held the discussions with restraint in order to keep the peace and brotherly love. For this they thanked the Lord and asked for His blessing on all the recommendations and decisions of the conference, for safety and for spreading His beneficial reign not only among Russian people but in the whole world.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

And may God fulfill the prophecies of the prophets, so that "the earth will be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9; Habakkuk 2:13).

The angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased" (Luke 2:14).



"For now in the eyes of all the people all are sons of God and brothers through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26-28).

At the conclusion of the conference, Holy Communion was celebrated. On the morning of Sunday, May 23, the Russian brothers held a meeting separately from the Germans. After lunch they met again. Brother Christian Schmidt preached a concluding sermon about giving to missions. The donations amounted to three hundred rubles.

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### **Concluding Comments by V. Skvortzov<sup>107</sup>**

Without further comments about the conclusion of the conference, we would like to draw the reader's attention to the German and Russian leaders' scheme to spread Stundobaptism. This clearly rules out the opinion of some people that Stundobaptism appeared and spread in Russia by itself, as a rebellion against the injustices of the Church, its way of life and the sins of the clergy. Injustices and faults have always existed and will always exist like weeds in a field of wheat. Without the Germans, however, Russians would never have developed the idea of Stundobaptism. It also would not have become so deeply rooted without the active leadership and financial support of those who lead astray and those who are led astray by this German-Russian committee. To receive 175 rubles for four months of being a missionary and to be a leader of meetings is a big temptation for a simple-minded ploughman. No wonder he will climb up the wall and end up in jail defending Stundobaptism. The proselytism of the Stundobaptist mission does not even leave the Tatar population alone. The whole area of Stundobaptist activity has been divided into districts for approximately ten years, with each assigned to a selected missionary. In fact, people are chosen according to their abilities and according to how well read they are. The relationships of the missionaries to each other are monitored, as is their zeal, etc.

After a pre-set period, the missionaries exchange their areas of responsibility to attract the attention of listeners with new faces and new methods of teaching. The decision to have two Stundist evangelists preach a sermon at the same time is a very good idea. Another practical idea is paying salaries to the evangelists. The mission does not take the evangelist-farmer away from his work

107 Skvortzov, "The Organization of the Stundobaptist Mission," 224-25.

or family and that way he can earn some extra money during the idle hours of autumn and winter.

The case of a well-known leader, Ryaboshapka, is a typical example of sudden decline in the morals of the Stundobaptists of the Kiev district. Even previously Stundobaptists committed evil, and because almost every one participated in this there was no one to warn or admonish them. In other words, their morals have declined significantly. Perhaps this striking illustration of the disintegrating morals of the sect will be a lesson to the liberal and uneducated sectarian defenders and those who blindly follow the so-called virtues of our sectarianism. In this Ryaboshapka is a competent and truthful witness.

## Report of the Annual Convention in Waldheim

May 17-20, 1903<sup>108</sup>

### Saturday, May 17

Preliminary meetings. Adoption of program for May 18.

### Sunday, May 18

Preaching of the gospel by brothers Isaac Friesen, David Schellenberg, Kornelius Fehr, David Dürksen, Herman Neufeld, Abraham Wall, Jacob Nikkel and Jacob Janz. Inspirational session concluded with the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

### Monday, May 19

Listing of the delegates of the various congregations:

Molotschna:	27
Herzenberg:	1
Einlage:	8
Wiesefeld:	4
Friedensfeld:	9
Sagradovka:	5
Naumenka:	3
Memrik:	7
Ignatievka:	4
Crimea:	9
Ufa:	2
Neu Samara	1
Orenburg Kamenka	1
Kuban	2
Total	83

David Dürksen and David Schellenberg were elected as chairmen.

Address by Br. David Schellenberg on the theme, "The Unity in the Spirit" and by Br. Jacob Reimer on "Walking in the Spirit," based on Galatians 5:13-25. The delegation requested that both addresses be published in the *Zionsbote* and the *Friedensstimme*.

<sup>108</sup> *Zionsbote*, 6 January 1904, 2.

Reports by itinerant ministers: Br. Hermann Neufeld, Br. Jacob Kröker and Br. Jacob Reimer.

First: The Lord did not withhold his blessing; there were many open doors. It is urgent to use the time well, both through evangelism and by conducting Bible studies to ground the believers more thoroughly in the Scriptures. Because of the shortage of time, the delegation decided not to hear Br. A. Wall's report about his itinerant ministry.

Sister Anna Epp from Rosenort indicated her intent to serve in foreign missions. She expects to go to India, the Lord willing. Brother and Sister Kornelius Unruh and Brother and Sister Johann Wiens have requested to return to Russia after they have completed their studies. They will then discuss plans regarding their departure to India. Sister Anna Epp has received a suitable preparation abroad for mission service. She has been highly recommended, and missionary Abraham Friesen of India has written a letter supporting her application. The delegation therefore decided to send her to serve in India with the Unruhs and Wienses.

The remainder of the day was spent discussing the issue of communion fellowship with believers of other confessions.

## **Tuesday, May 20**

Continuation of the discussions from Monday. Most of the delegates did not favor communion at the Lord's Supper with believers who were not baptized according to the scriptural mode (i.e., by immersion). The result of these discussions, which were conducted under the palpable presence of Christ, was the unanimous decision by the delegation to exercise the love of Christ to those who disagreed in their understanding concerning the above-mentioned fellowship at the Lord's Supper as practiced by several individuals. (We could also cite Acts 15:28 in this regard: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."—M.H.)

The chairman, David Dürksen presented the following motion:

a) Those who by personal conviction disagree with the practice of open communion as recently celebrated by some brothers should signify this by rising.

Fifty-nine delegates rose.

b) Those who by personal conviction agree with open communion likewise signify by rising.

Thirteen delegates rose.

Ten delegates abstained and one delegate was absent.



After this vote the chairman submitted the following resolution:  
Do the brothers of different persuasions agree to support each other in love as before?

The delegation unanimously agreed to do this and signified it by rising.

#### **Appointment of itinerant ministers.**

The brothers Abraham Wall, Jacob Reimer, Herman Neufeld and Jacob Kröker indicated their willingness to serve the Lord to whom they had committed themselves. The congregations will support them as before.

Those appointed for the entire year were requested to serve away from home for six months. Those appointed for six months are expected to spend three months travelling away from home.

Besides the brothers named above, several brothers from various congregations expressed willingness to serve for shorter periods (one-two months) in the itinerant ministry. They will also receive appropriate remuneration.

In the discussions about destinations for the itinerant ministry, it was emphasized that the men in the forestry camps should not be neglected.

Br. Heinrich Braun was asked to devote himself to the work of Sunday schools and young people's groups. The delegation also asked him to collect the congregational statistics.

#### **Treasury: All accounts**

Previous balance plus revenue	24696 R, 62 K
Expenses	13106 R, 80 K
<b>Balance</b>	<b>11590 R, 82 K</b>

The session closed with a hymn and prayers by Br. David Schellenberg and Jacob Janz, which included intercession for the aged former leader and elder, Aron Lepp.

*M. Hiebert [secretary]*

## Report of the Mennonite Brethren Convention at Reinfeld, May 4-6, 1904<sup>109</sup>

The days during which the delegates of the various congregations gathered in Reinfeld from May 4 to 6 were rich days of blessing and work. Tuesday morning, May 4, the brothers met in the barn [*Scheune*] of Br. Jakob Siemens for a prayer meeting. Br. Kornelius Fehr read I Timothy 2:1-6 and made a few encouraging remarks. After the reading of Scripture, several individuals prayed fervently and earnestly for His Majesty Tsar Nicholas II Alexandrovitch, for the entire family of the Tsar, for the Fatherland, for the ending of the war and bloodshed, for the affairs of the Kingdom and for God's blessing for the days of deliberation. On the unanimous recommendation of the delegation, the brothers Wilhelm Dyck, Isaak Regehr, Heinrich Braun and Johann Toews agreed to take minutes of the discussions and resolutions. David Schellenberg similarly agreed to chair the session.

A letter from Br. Lehmann wishing God's blessing was received by the delegation.

Br. W. Koslowsky greeted the delegation with the words of Scripture from Ephesians 1:17-19.

The deliberations in the morning revealed that the ears, hands and hearts of the delegates were open toward the workers in the Kingdom of God and for work that was pleasing to God. Indeed, to be redeemed awakens a desire for the redemption of others. The morning closed with a hymn and prayer.

After the noon recess the session began with the hymn, "Herr und Ält'ster deiner Kreuzgemeinde" and prayers by several brethren. The afternoon meeting gave further evidence that those who are born again, by their very nature, respect and love each other in the Lord's work despite differences of opinion. One could feel such an atmosphere during the singing of "Ich fall zu Jesu Füßen" and when several brothers prayed earnestly. How very blessed it will be when, according to I Corinthians 13:8-13, all tongues, all knowledge and all patch-work will cease and only love will prevail!

In the afternoon we also learned about how the Lord has led wonderfully and gloriously in the work and with the workers in his

<sup>109</sup> *Zionsbote*, 6 July 1904, 7-8.

kingdom. Thus he beckons Br. Hermann Neufeld, who has ministered here effectively until now, to America, and at the same time he makes Br. Peter Thielmann willing to serve in the same way that Br. Neufeld did. Actually, it is still to be determined whether Br. Neufeld will really go to America.<sup>110</sup> Brother Thielmann, who has already ministered effectively for several years in a village school, meanwhile will continue for another year in this important work. Brother Wiens, who with his wife is ready to begin foreign mission work in India, is temporarily being kept at home by the Lord to await the full restoration of his health. For the time being, Brother and Sister Wiens will live in Tiege, Molotschna, and be active in ministry as much as possible. I wish to remind the brothers and sisters, who may not understand why God is leading them in this way, of a quotation that has often been a comfort to me. It states, "God will direct affairs in the way that is best, etc."

The financial reports also gave evidence of the fact that the children of God are not tired of doing the Lord's work. Likewise the report of the treasurer brought rejoicing to the children of God and brought honor to the Lord. The treasurer, who had served faithfully and conscientiously for fifteen years, asked to be released from his duties. When the delegates heartily thanked him for his services and unanimously asked him to serve another three years, however, he agreed to continue serving the cause of the Lord.

These remarks concerning finances and the treasurer already relate to the sessions of May 5, which Br. Jakob Janz opened by reading Romans 14 and with prayer. Brother Janz is alert and energetic although he is in his seventies and a widower. Well, all this is by the way.

Further deliberations revealed that Brothers Jakob Janzen and Karl Füllbrandt are among those who are receiving remuneration, although they have not requested it. All the congregations represented have brothers who are willing to sow the seed of God's Word to young and old.

Responsibility for Sunday school and youth work was committed to the care of the brothers Heinrich Braun, Johann Wiens, Peter Unruh and Jakob Friesen. Oh, how important it is to pray, "Lord, fill us with a deep love for you so that we may become worthy to become your lambs and your sheep."

After a noon recess the session opened with the hymn, "So lang mein Jesus lebt," and prayer.

110 Editor's note: The Neufelds did not migrate to Canada until 1923.



The itinerant ministry was organized next. This program is analogous to the practical sower who exchanged his seed to secure more fruit. The one purpose for such a gathering and meeting of God's children is to win souls for the Lord.

The visits to the forestry camps were also attended to.

The afternoon session closed with the singing of the hymn, "Sie jauchzet doch mit Freuden" and prayer.

After the supper recess, Br. Isaak opened the next session with the hymn, "Will ich des Kreuzes Streiter sein" and prayer. Two brothers were assigned to conduct Bible study courses for ministers of the Word in Sagra dovka and wherever else they receive invitations. The principle of every laboring minister should be, "I dig trenches, so I am not ashamed to beg."

By motion of a brother, Sister Elizabeth Esau of Tokultschack was encouraged to prepare for mission service. The expenses of the same will be covered by money from the education fund.

The delegates from the Friedensfeld congregation invited the Conference to convene in Friedensfeld for its next convention.

Quickened by a fresh spring breeze from above, the delegation sang the hymn, "Wie lieblich ist's hienieden." Then the brothers Hermann Neufeld and Jakob Reimer prayed. The congregation stood for the closing stanza, which stated, "Nun danket alle Gott," etc.

Thus far is a general summary of the days of deliberations. The days were filled with hard work and rich blessings.

Then followed a festive day, namely May 6, which was Ascension Day and, simultaneously, the birthday of His Majesty, Tsar Nicholas II Alexandrovitch.

[A detailed summary of the Sunday services follows—Editor]



## Exerpts from the Minutes of the Annual Convention of the Mennonite Brethren Church held at Niolaievka on May 17, 1907<sup>111</sup>

Missionary Jakob Heinrichs reported about the work in India. The Lord is revealing himself graciously in the work among the heathen, he reported, which we are privileged to participate in. The Telegu region has a population of eighteen million, of whom only nine million are under the influence of the gospel. The area served by the Russian brothers has a population of about four million. We have won major victories in this kingdom work, the most glorious of which happened this year. Our mission experienced the energizing work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has already redeemed sixty thousand heathen in India. We had adequate means to set up the stations. Life was also evident, but the missionaries were not satisfied. There was not enough energy. In his time, however, the Lord poured out his Spirit in answer to the fervent prayers of his children and the deep yearning of their hearts, strengthened by God's Word.

Brother Heinrichs spoke at the occasion of a conference on John 4:16. An aged brother from the heathen requested that he write the text on a piece of paper so that he could use it in his daily prayers.

Contrary to expectations, the Lord did not begin the revival at the main stations but in a remote area. Powerful forces began to work. The Lord graciously provided the abundance promised in John 10:11. The children of God experienced the Psalmist's utterance, "The Lord has done great things," reviving their expectation that more great things would happen in the future. Meanwhile, the children of God are preparing the way for the Lord, that the King of Glory may enter. Now the people belonging to the castes are also coming. Greater things will occur than have already occurred! The revival first convicted and cleansed the children of God, and this has come from God. The same experiences have not happened everywhere, but one thing we have experienced: the power of God has manifested itself in the entire work and gives us good reason to look forward with much hope.

Brother Karl Mascher prayed with thanks for the Lord's work in India and for the fullness of the Holy Spirit for our congregations, for

111 *Friedensstimme*, 2 June 1907, 277-278.

the conference in session and for himself personally. Brother Mascher then reported concerning the work in Cameroon. The work of the Lord is proceeding slowly, he stated. Because of the unhealthy climate the question whether the mission in Cameroon should be discontinued has arisen repeatedly. But the opposite question, "Is that justified?" has kept us from such action, since even our Lord did not shrink from difficulties but continued even to death. During the past year there were abundant harvests even in Cameroon. Presently there are twenty German workers at the Cameroon mission. Many difficulties impede the work because of the attitudes of the native population. The brother called the delegates to prayer for the mission in Cameroon.

The mission has also experienced the Lord's help with respect to financial matters. Br. Mascher expressed his feelings, in view of the Lord's work, as follows: "It has prospered; indeed, until now it has prospered."

Brother Rosenberg, the missionary to the Jews, reported briefly about the Jewish mission. He rejoiced that, as an Israeli, he could rejoice in the Lord and that he could stand as a worker among the dead bones of the people of Israel and preach the gospel to them. This has hardly been done until now. The Lord has begun to bless Israel, he stated. In Odessa three services are conducted weekly for the Jews. Some have been won for the Lord; others are close to being won. The brother has been comforted by the fact that the Lord revives dead bones. Brother Rosenberg appealed to the delegates to pray for Israel, especially for the work of the Lord in Odessa. Working among Jews is difficult; the mission needs our prayers.

Brother Johann Isaak requested an opportunity to say something about the Russian mission. From the very beginning of our work, he reported, it has been connected with the Russian mission. By God's grace we gave the Russian brethren their first conference in the early 1880s. We were able to continue in this work and send them important workers, such as Br. J. Wieler and others. Today the Russian brothers have become a large and intelligent group of people and they are very active in the mission among the Russians. We do not want to withdraw, he insisted. Russia needs our Christianity and our culture. Brother Isaac appealed to the delegates to serve the Russian people.

Brother Adolf Reimer brought hearty greetings from the Russian brothers and sisters and expressed their sincerest thanks that the Mennonite Brethren had commissioned a brother from their midst to serve them. Brother Reimer also reported concerning his experi-

ences when he formally decided to work in the Russian mission. The Lord was with him in his work and helped him through all his difficulties and led his work to victory. Brother Reimer had the opportunity to work in many places among the Russians and was richly blessed everywhere. Amidst joy over success in the work, pain also emerged, because so little was accomplished among such great masses. Therefore, Br. Reimer appealed for more workers to be sent into the work among the Russians. He underscored the sentiments expressed by Br. Mascher, that the Holy Spirit fill the children of God with power that might flow forth.

Brother C. Reimer reported on how mission work is conducted in Russia and how many are still able to work. The brothers in the province of Charchov are supporting a brother who is working in their province. Reimer visited approximately 138 villages. On average he found about ten brothers in each village. One brother, from a village where no one was able to read, travelled with him for ten days and learned to read. When he returned around Christmas, he found that the specified brother had proclaimed the Word of the Lord to the whole village by reading and speaking. Let us work, for a reaction will come; let us pray and work for the Russian mission.

Brother Jakob Wiens from Samara reported next. "May Jerusalem (i.e., our Fatherland) prosper," he stated. "I rejoice concerning every report that I have heard. The reports are simply proof that the God of old still lives. God has done great things and will continue to do great things. During my three years of ministry in the province of Samara I found a great hunger for the Word of God. The Lord has redeemed many, but so much work remains. Many workers are still needed. The work continues in the city of Samara. It is also beginning to take root among the intelligentsia. We had the privilege of accepting an academically trained individual and an officer into our congregation. The officer was awakened during a battle in the distant east. He returned home and gave his possessions to the poor, as he had read in the Word. During a trip to Saratov he met a bookseller who invited him into his house. The bookseller was won for Jesus through the witness of the children of God. The simple words of the woman of the house, who asked him whether he believed in Jesus, were especially gripping. The question appeared strange to him. But the sister continued, 'Do you have eternal life? The Scriptures say that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.' Then his heart was broken and overcome, and he became a follower of Jesus."



## Report of the Mennonite Brethren Convention at Nikolaievka, May 24-27, 1907<sup>112</sup>

Immediately after the conference of regional German Baptists from May 24-27, the annual session of the Mennonite Brethren took place from May 31 to June 3 at Nikolaievka. They had sent a representative, Brother Heinrich Braun, to Neu-Danzig to meet Br. Mascher and me and to accompany us on the trip to their conference and their congregations, and to pay all our expenses. We were received just as heartily as by our own brothers in Neu-Danzig. They are, of course, one heart and soul with us. They are baptist-minded as we are, have a church polity that is modeled on ours (next to the Scriptures), follow the Hamburg Confession of Faith, preach the crucified Christ as we do, sing our hymns and send their workers to our great mission field in India. Twelve of their sons and daughters labor shoulder to shoulder with us in that vineyard of the Lord and have sacrificed much for him. In several areas they differ from us, including the following: they practice foot washing; they do not swear the oath and refuse to do military service where weapons are carried; they have no salaried ministers; and they practice the primitive simplicity in their churches and worship services, which naturally can only strengthen true worship . . .

Therefore, the delegates of the congregations gathered in Nikolaievka for their annual sessions, which it was my privilege to attend. They bestowed on us all the privileges of their own delegates, and gave us a prominent place on the program here as in Neu-Danzig. Approximately one thousand delegates and visitors gathered, and not one place in the entire colony was found that would have been large enough to seat all the guests. Therefore, they cleaned up the large barn of the congregation's elder, Br. Neufeld, to provide room for the deliberations and the worship sessions. We found that the Lord is not bound to any one place to pour out his blessings. God's blessings not only flowed freely into our hearts but they will also flow abundantly on all the mission fields where our fellow workers are active . . .

At the above-mentioned conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Nikolaievka, the conference decided to send Br. Heinrich Braun to Persia with me at its expense, because he is competent in the Russian

112 From J. Heinrichs, "Russische Missionsglocken," *Sendbote*, 9 Oct. 1907, 5-6.



language. Russian influence is considerable in the northwest region of Persia where I was commissioned to go. When Br. Mascher also decided to go with us, an additional one hundred rubles were designated for us on the trip. May the Lord reward the brethren!

## **Minutes of the Annual Convention of the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, May 14 and 15, 1910 in Tiege, Sagraodovka<sup>113</sup>**

Introduction by Brother Herman Neufeld. He referred to the coronation ceremony and commented on it in relation to 1 Tim. 2:1-6. He and several brothers followed with prayer for the Tsar and the realm, and the singing of the national anthem.

### **Session 1**

Introduced by Br. Herman Neufeld, by reading John 15 and with prayer.

Elder Johann Nikkel, Tiege, declared the convention open.

Eighty-eight delegates were present as representatives of the various congregations:

Einlage: Martin Koslowsky, Johann Peters, Jakob Siemens, Gerhard Regehr, Daniel Braun, Jakob Koslowsky, Kornelius Pauls and Peter Niebuhr.

Alexanderheim: Johann Epp.

Fürstenland: Dietrich Wiebe, Jakob Janzen.

Millerovo: Wilhelm Dyck, Jakob Wiebe.

Naumenko: Johann Neufeld, Johann Pauls, Abram Unruh, and Gerhard Siemens.

Friedensfeld: Jakob Janz, Peter Funk, Heinrich Friesen Jr., Isaak Töws, Franz Krause, Peter Krause, Franz Wieler, Abram Wall, Kornelius Janzen.

Kamenka: Jakob Friesen, Kornelius Fehr.

Kuban: Franz Martens, Isaak Wiebe.

Memrik: Franz Goossen, Peter Rogalsky, Jakob Fröse.

Masaievka: David Dörksen, Jakob Enns, and Martin Janzen.

Steintal: Franz Fröse, Abram Rempel, and Heinrich Hüberr.

Nikolaievka: Herman Neufeld, David Block and David Neufeld.

Molotschna: Rückenau: Martin Friesen, Heinrich Dück, Abram Friesen, Heinrich Sukkau, Peter Regehr.

Alexandertal: Heinrich Köhn, Heinrich Goossen Jr.

Waldheim: Kornelius Klassen, Johann Rahn, and Peter Köhn.

Tiegenhagen: Abraham Kröker, Heinrich Braun.

Tiege: Benjamin Janz, Philipp Cornies.

Herzenberg: Heinrich Penner, Johann Friesen

Lugovsk: Jakob Wieler, Klaas Töws.

Terek: Jakob Dörksen.

Crimea: Jakob Hübert, Peter Görzen.

Tiege, Sagradovka: Johann Nickel, Isaak Regehr, Johann

Warkentin, Aron Warkentin, Franz Regehr, Wilhelm Dückmann,

Peter Thielmann, Paul Koop, Abram Regehr, Jakob Friesen, Pe-

ter Boldt, Heinrich Wiens, Peter Heidebrecht, Johann

Warkentin, Jakob Martens, Kornelius Regehr, Abraham Reimer,

Heinrich Fast, Peter Voth, Jakob Martens.

#### **Affiliates:**

Novo-Nikolaievka: Jakob Epp, Johann Dörksen.

Durlin: Johann Pauls.

Sentscherev: Bernhard Hamm.

Tschunajevka: Jakob Wiens.

Ufa: Jakob Martens.

Foreign missionary: Heinrich Unruh.

### **Report concerning the work in our congregations:**

Brother Jakob Wiens reported that a vast field exists in Siberia. He has travelled 1600 verst by sleigh in the last winter. In the fall of 1908 he travelled to the Pavlodar and Barnaul settlements. Brother Abraham Unruh was confirmed as minister by recommendation of the Pavlodar congregation, and Br. Johann Töws was temporarily assigned to the leadership of the Barnaul congregation. Brother Wiens visited the congregations in Siberia twice accompanied by Br. Giesbrecht and assigned the workers in the kingdom of God to them so that they could grow independently. In February 1910 Br. Wiens made another visit, which lasted two months, and gave advice to the ministering brethren concerning work in the congregations. He also advised concerning the keeping of minutes according to the methods ratified by the government. The Barnaul settlement has a congregational seal as the Kulunda Mennonite Brethren Church because it is located on the Kulunda steppes. The Barnaul settlement has four main places of worship in thirty-four districts and Pavlodar has five main places of worship in fourteen districts; in Lichtfelde there is one congre-

gation in four districts and in the Rebrovka settlement there are two worship places.

Brother H. Braun stated that Br. Wiens had acted fully according to the wishes of the church and according to need, and he believed that we not only should endorse this as Br. Wiens' requests, but also thank him. This was confirmed by rising.

Brother Jakob Dörksen, Terek, expressed gratitude for the confidence that had extended to him. He stated: I have to report the opposite of what Br. Wiens reported. We are discouraged because our hopes for proper natural progress are constantly being taken from us. As a result spiritual depression is also setting in. He requests that Terek be remembered in prayer in a special way.

Brother Abraham Wall reported concerning his trip to Siberia. The occasion for the trip was the wedding of his son in Omsk. He took advantage of this opportunity to visit the brothers, and to preach in three of the places of worship that the government had authorized. He also visited Br. Janz and the affiliate congregations in Poland, where they are being richly blessed.

His main work has been in the Friedensfeld congregation at home. He also visited Molotschna, Herzenberg, Naumenko, Yazikovo and Einlage, preaching and offering Bible studies. Brother Jakob Janz stated that Poland was a heavy burden on his heart and he recommended visits there at every opportunity.

Brother Peter Köhn stated that he had made four trips this past year. The first was to Sergeievka, Durilov, etc. via Odessa to the forestry station at Ananievka, where people were especially grateful because they receive few visits.

The second trip was to Samara and Orenburg.

The third trip was to the Chortitza Colony accompanied by Peter Görzen. They were privileged to experience special blessings there and became aware (which they attributed to circumstances) that many prayers were uttered for them during prayer week.

The fourth trip included Memrik, Naumenko and Ignatievo. On this trip I was also privileged to experience God's blessing. "I am undeserving of all the mercy and faithfulness," the brother testified.

Brother Jakob Martens, Ufa, stated, "I can only give a brief report because my activity primarily relates to the work in the School for the Poor. We only have eighty-four children this year because many moved to Siberia." He visited the brothers at Jelenskaia who are living in real isolation. They are very anxious to have visitors. "A particular circumstance in our congregation was the exhaustion of our leading



Brother Heinrichs because of the extensive work in a new settlement. At his request and recommendation, ten brothers were elected to provide leadership for one year. Br. Martens also reported concerning the grace that they had received by the sacrificial giving of a brother who had built them a place of worship. They also have a school, which under good leadership has recently received high recognition from the lord governor.

Brother Fehr closed the first session with the hymn, "Unser Gott und Vater Du," and prayer.

Noon recess until 3:00.

## **Session 2**

Introduction with a hymn and prayer led by Br. Peter Görzen.

1. Brother Herman Neufeld reported that besides the local congregation, he had first visited the Talma congregation with Br. Wilhelm Klassen. In addition to preaching and leading Bible studies, he had ordained Br. J. Dörksen as elder there. He also visited the brothers and sisters along the southeast railroad, and several colonies in the Molotschna with Br. Abraham Neustädter. He visited the congregation at Lugovsk with Br. Schellenberg and performed several ordinations with the elder Br. Martens. After that he visited the brothers in Orenburg. The work with the children's worship services was especially comforting and encouraging.

End of Reports

### **2. Report concerning the status of the accounts.**

The statements had not yet been audited because there were no auditors, so the brothers Martin Friesen, Martin Koslowsky and Peter Funk were nominated as auditors for the Conference and Education accounts. This was unanimously accepted.

Brothers Jakob Martens, Altonau, Johann Rahn and Jakob Wiens were nominated as auditors for the Foreign Missions account. Unanimously accepted.

### **3. Concerning education support for a brother from the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren congregation.**

After clarification of the issue it was moved that Br. Johann Penner be supported in the amount of four hundred rubles per year for three years, on condition that he work according to the will of the Conference; otherwise, he is to repay the support funds. Br. Penner is to sign according to the terms stipulated. The motion was seconded and unanimously accepted.

#### 4. Concerning missions among the heathen in general.

After serving twenty-one years as treasurer of the Foreign Missions account, Br. Jakob Siemens is retiring. The Conference session expressed its gratitude to him for his service and signalled this by rising. Several brothers were nominated as treasurers but Br. H. Braun, Halbstadt, was the preferred candidate. Because Br. Braun was willing to accept the position, the motion to appoint him was unanimously accepted. Brother Abraham Friesen was unanimously appointed as intermediary between us and the brothers and sisters in India.

#### Eight-minute Recess

Hymn: "Heilger Geist, Du Trost und Rat."

Brother Abraham Friesen reported concerning the articles about foreign missions in *Erntefeld*. He encouraged active participation in this work. He also asked for suggestions to improve the same and for solicitation of additional readers, because the proceeds go entirely to support the mission in India. Brother J. Wiens recommended that sample copies be included with the *Friedensstimme* from October until the New Year. Unanimously accepted.

Brother Abraham Friesen received five hundred rubles in remuneration for his work with *Erntefeld*. Unanimously accepted.

Brother H. Unruh read a letter from the brothers and sisters in India. They wish the Conference God's richest blessings for the sessions and describe the work and the struggles of past year, and also the visible results of the gospel in all areas.

Closing of the session with the hymn, "Herr du wirst dein Reich erhalten" and prayer by Br. Heinrich Unruh.

### Session 3

#### Morning of May 15

Introduction led by Br. Peter Regehr, Margenau, with a hymn and prayer. Text: Luke 13:22.

1. The previous day's minutes were read and accepted after a few corrections.

2. On a motion by Br. Heinrich Braun the annual convention expressed its joy and gratitude to the brothers and sisters in India for yesterday's report about the work in the heathen land. The leader of the session, Br. B. Regehr, was asked to convey the joy and gratitude of the convention to the brothers and sisters in India and to wish

them God's blessing for their work in the future.

3. The report of the auditors of the Foreign Missions account was read:

Balance in fund from 1909	5,934.51 rubles
Income during the year	15,351.88 "
Income plus previous balance	21,286.39 "

Expenses	<u>14,312.36 "</u>
Balance in fund	6,974.03 "

This was approved and unanimously accepted.

4. The auditors of the Conference treasury reported as follows:

Income plus previous balance	8,649.10 rubles
Expenses	<u>6,807.64 "</u>
Balance remaining	1,841.46 "

This also was approved and unanimously accepted.

5. The following report of the auditors regarding the Education Fund was read and unanimously accepted:

Income	1,904.78 rubles
Expenses	<u>700.52 "</u>
Balance in treasury	1,204.26 "

6. The religious training of our youth was discussed. Many worthwhile suggestions and recommendations were offered. One brother read from page 36 of our Confession of Faith concerning the training of children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. He pointed out that this not only should be spoken but also practiced to a greater extent. Many brothers emphasized that more should be offered for our children and especially for the inner development of mature youth. To be sure, the prescribed religious instruction in the village schools is worthy of recognition; nevertheless, much remains to be done for our youth both by positive influence in family life and through special children's services and youth meetings. Excellent pointers for this work can be found in Psalm 78 and Luke 13:13. Finally, the need for visits by ministers in the forestry camps was emphasized. The convention requested the congregations at Sagradovka, Friedensfeld and Einlage to be responsible for the visits to the forestry camps in the governmental district of Kherson.

The Molotschna and Crimea congregations were made responsible for visits to the Berdiansk and Philoxerakomando forestry camps.



Memrik, Janatiev, Naumenkovo and Millerovo are responsible for the Anadola and Azova forestry camps.

7. Bible course for our ministers.

Because our ministers are elected from our midst and many of them have little education, the need arises that they be furthered in the knowledge of the Word of God and in our doctrinal teachings. This could be accomplished by organizing appropriate and timely courses. The brothers Wilhelm Dyck, Peter Tielmann and Heinrich Braun were commissioned to appeal to the government for permission to implement such practical Bible courses.

May 15, Afternoon

Introduction led by Br. Peter Köhn, Waldheim, with a hymn and prayer.

8. Whether the congregations desire their own periodical.

It was noted that the periodical *Erntefeld* is happy to receive reports from our circles. The convention recommended that reports from the brotherhood circles be sent for publication in the *Erntefeld*. Therefore the convention desisted from the publication of its own periodical for the time being and expressed its satisfaction with the *Erntefeld*.

9. Debate concerning the marriage of Mennonites from different Mennonite groups.

The occasion for this was a letter from Elder Heinrich Unruh, Muntau, which was read first. The convention unanimously advised not to depart from the legal practices under any circumstances but to uphold them consistently. The convention commissioned Br. H. Braun to communicate this to the Mennonite Conference.

10. Brother H. Braun reported that the government has recognized the Bethania hospital for the mentally ill, which the Mennonites of Russia established. Now attention is being given to establishing an institution for the poorest of the poor. The land for this has been purchased, and it is hoped that two wings of the building will be completed this year. Building this institution will be very costly and a strong appeal is made to support the project by prayer and through gifts. Further questions relating to the "Bethania" institution will be discussed at the fall convention of the Mennonite leadership, to which our congregations are to send their representatives.

11. Brother H. Braun reported concerning his trip to St. Petersburg with two other Mennonite representatives. The high government authorities explained to the deputies that they had no intention of restricting the



Mennonites regarding their religious requirements and practices. It was pointed out that the question of congregational records has not yet been clarified in the laws. Therefore steps have been taken to insure that persons who are authorized by the government for this purpose keep our records. Furthermore, the government is asking us to define our church constitution clearly and to submit our requests regarding educational issues. The brothers Wilhelm Dyck, Peter Tielmann and Heinrich Braun were commissioned to translate our Confession of Faith into the Russian language, to draft an explanation of the Confession of Faith, and to present it to the convention. The convention expressed its gratitude concerning the good will of the higher governing authorities toward us and therefore feels under even greater obligation to pray for the gracious lord of our land, the Tsar, and for all the authorities.

12. The chairman of the convention read a letter from a sister Aganeta Neufeld, who feels obligated to dedicate herself to the work of foreign missions. She requests advice and support from the annual convention. The sister is highly recommended by her home congregation in Orenburg and by the Deaconess home, "Moriia" where she has lived for the past while. Brother A. Friesen moved that the named sister be supported for two years in the amount of 150 rubles from the Education Fund under the same conditions as stated in item 3 of the second session of this year's convention respecting Br. Penner. This was unanimously accepted.

13. The chairman reported that sister Maria Vogt, who was a member of the Einlage congregation and had received a loan of 104 rubles from the Conference that was guaranteed by the Einlage congregation for the midwifery course in Riga, had passed away. The Einlage congregation was released of its obligation to repay the loan.

14. The convention requested Br. Wilhelm Dyck, Millerovo, who had already anticipated doing this work, to continue to function as statistician.

15. The convention approved the Kuban as the location of the next annual convention.

16. Delegates of various congregations were requested to sign the minutes.

17. The minutes were read and after several corrections were unanimously accepted.

## **Minutes of the Annual Convention of the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia**

**which met on May 25, 26 and 27, 1912 in the house of worship of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church at Rückenau, Province of Tavrida**<sup>114</sup>

Brother Heinrich Braun greeted the delegates on behalf of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren congregation with Colossians 3:12ff. He expressed his sincere desire that delegates participate in the convention, bound by the cord of love, and that everything would be done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Brother Jacob Wiens, Tschunaievka, gave a short introductory sermon based on Psalm 102:13-23. He spoke approximately as follows:

If we examine the introduction to the Psalm more closely, we will notice that David was experiencing a condition of need and distress. Therefore it is surprising that he remembers the need of the Kingdom of God rather than his own need in his prayer. From the biblical point of view, this is natural because his life was intimately tied to the kingdom of God. The welfare of the kingdom of God was his own welfare, and the need of the kingdom of God was his own need. If we are gathered here to build the kingdom of God according to the gifts God has given us, then it is a prerequisite that we also adopt this mindset. It is certainly not by chance that we are gathered here on May 25, on the birthday of our most gracious Tsarina, Alexandra Feodorovna. We will be reminded more often than usual on this day about the welfare of our dear fatherland, to which we owe so much gratitude. It also is obvious that the welfare of our fatherland cannot be divorced from the welfare of our illustrious family of the Tsar. Our experience teaches us that in order to achieve the welfare of the fatherland it is not enough to have a good upbringing and high education, but to live in the fear of God. For the welfare of a people, an entire nation, and especially for our dear fatherland, we need a

true fear of God. So that we also may learn during these sessions to produce and increase this fear of God in our children and ourselves, we want to unite in common prayer and several brothers will lead us.

1. Item 1: Verification of Delegates

The copy of the confirmed list of delegates was read; it indicated the presence of sixty-five delegates.

2. Brother Braun declared the convention open, since the Minister of the Interior had granted such permission in response to Braun's request.

3. Item 2 of the Agenda

By majority vote Br. Heinrich Braun was elected chairman of the convention and Br. Herman Neufeld was elected his assistant. Brother Johann Pauls, Johann Schellenberg, Wilhelm Dyck, and Johann Töws were appointed secretaries.

The morning session concluded with prayer by Br. J. Janzen from Friedensfeld. A two-hour noon recess followed.

The afternoon session opened with prayer by Br. Cornelius Fehr (Orenburg) and the singing of a hymn.

4. The chairman read a copy of the approved agenda and asked whether it should be followed in the order presented. The delegation approved the agenda as read.

5. Item 3 of the Agenda

Brother Isaak Neufeld, Kornelius Wiens and Johann Isaak were appointed auditors for the review of the Conference and Education financial statements; Br. Abraham Regehr, Martin Koslowsky and Franz Janzen for the Foreign Missions and Bulgarian Missions statements.

6. Item 4 of the Agenda

Several brothers gave short reports about itinerant ministries in particular congregations. Brother Abraham Wall traveled to Poland with Br. Jacob Janz of Friedensfeld and visited the Mennonite congregations there. Everywhere they witnessed a tremendous longing for the Word of God and a general appreciation for the visit. On the return journey he visited the forestry station at Tschernolessowka. Later he ministered at the five stations of the Friedensfeld congregation, preaching, conducting Bible studies and working in the children's services. From there he went to the Yasikovo settlement. During a visit at "Bethania," Br. Wall was especially moved by what the Lord Jesus said as he observed the scattered masses of people: "I feel compassion for the people."



They also visited Barvenkovo and Rerberg. Finally Br. Wall visited the Kuban. From there Br. Kornelius Wiens accompanied him to Vuvorovskaia and Terek. At the latter place they discerned the brothers' tremendous trust in the Lord despite their difficult physical circumstances. Much refreshed and strengthened, Br. Wall and Br. Wiens departed from there.

Brother P. Köhn (Waldheim) undertook two lengthy and several shorter itinerant ministries. The first trip related to the Alt Berdiansk, Neu Berdiansk and Altergi forestry posts. From there he traveled to Crimea. There he was engaged in a blessed ministry in association with Br. Johann Wiens. Later he traveled to Nepluiev for a Bible study. At this occasion he also visited the Friedensfeld and Yazikovo congregations. In the Kuban he ministered in association with Br. Jacob Reimer. The Lord revealed himself in a wonderful way through his Word. From there he travelled to Suvorovskaia. Brother Köhn, speaking for the congregation there, requested assistance from the convention for building a house of worship. After New Year Br. Köhn, accompanied by Br. Günther, traveled to Alt Samara and then to Neu Samara. There they were richly blessed during a Bible study. Brother Köhn also ministered with the Word as much as possible, at home and in the surrounding area, trusting in the Lord.

Brother Jacob Wiens (Tschunaievka) reported that for various reasons he had been unable fully to honor the requests of the congregations. At first he served with Br. Franz Wiens in Siberia. Later he traveled to Samara, Davlekanovo and Alt Samara accompanied by Br. David Janzen. For the most part his services related to the regional churches in Siberia. The conversion of lost souls and the revival of God's children repeatedly gave him courage for his work. There also was much work among the needy, who were suffering from famine. They provided them with food and seed to grow crops.

Brother Jacob Dörksen (Terek) visited the stations surrounding Memrik during the summer months. One visit related to the mental hospital, Bethania. Later he travelled to the Crimea. He visited about twenty stations in the area and served the stations of Kamenskaia and Millerovo with the Word. Feeling inwardly compelled, he travelled back to Terek and visited Prochladnaia, Suvorovskaia and Chasaviurt on this trip. Everywhere a deep hunger for the Word of God was evident. The brothers at Terek hoped that Br. Dörksen would devote himself more to the Caucasus in the future.

Brother Kornelius Fehr (Orenburg) visited Siberia. He had many opportunities to serve the needy. The sacrificial giving of dear friends



wiped away the tears of many of the poor. With the relief workers he distributed approximately five hundred pud of flour among the poor of the various stations. He expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the dear donors on behalf of the many whom they helped.

Brother Herman Neufeld (Nikolaievka) visited the Old Colony and some communities in the Molotschna. Then he travelled with Br. Johann Schellenberg to Siberia, where they visited the settlements in Barnaul and Pavlodar. Later he visited the Orenburg settlement. The cold stormy weather threatened to hinder his ministry. Brother Neufeld expressed his gratitude for the confidence that had been placed in him. He felt that it might be God's will for him to decline any formal appointment in the future and any financial support from the congregation.

7. Items 5, 6 and 7 were postponed because the financial statements had not yet been audited and item 8 was reviewed more carefully.

Brother David Klassen reported on the forestry service. He stated approximately as follows:

The alternative service workers are a reflection of our larger church. The young men in the forestry camps behave according to character, for the most part. As long as the situation of our young men, despite their shortcomings, does not deteriorate, our people are not yet lost. He challenged us to show the emperor, the empire and the world that we are truly and clearly messengers of peace. He was not about to despair about the peace concept and hopes that the young men at home will be taught to be true envoys of peace, and not to postpone this until they enter forestry service.

8. Item 7 of the agenda

The convention was reminded that according to an earlier decision, any brother who was unable to complete his full assignment was to be paid on a pro-rated basis. Exceptions should not be ruled out.

A one-hour supper recess followed.

## **Evening Session**

Brother Peter Köhn was appointed secretary to replace Br. Johann Schellenberg, who declined secretarial duties.

9. Item 9 of the Agenda

Appointment of several ministers to visit the forestry camps and various congregations.

a) Br. Gerhard Regehr announced that the Einlage congregation opposed the appointment of Br. Peter Köhn because his

ministry at Alt Samara was not in keeping with the position of the Conference. At the request of the convention, Br. Köhn explained his ministry there. After some voices spoke both for and against the issue, Br. Jacob Reimer moved that because the Molotschna congregation favored his appointment, Br. P. Köhn be appointed for another year, that the local congregations review the matter, and that it be dealt with at the next convention. This was accepted by a vote of 30 to 22.

b) The other brothers were asked to continue ministering as before. Brother Herman Neufeld explained that he was hardly able to continue working, but if the convention as a whole desired it, he would not withdraw. Brother Peter Unruh moved, and it was seconded and carried, that Br. Neufeld receive full remuneration and that he minister in other areas as much as possible.

c) Brother Jacob Wiens stated that, based on an earlier decision, he was to receive half his remuneration from his own congregations and the other half from the Conference treasury. Considering the present difficult situation, he had relinquished the latter half. He now requested, on behalf of his congregations, that future Conference remuneration be increased to 150 rubles to replace the amount that those congregations had agreed to assume for the General Conference.<sup>115</sup> This was unanimously accepted for the years 1912 and 1913.

d) Brother Wall was reappointed. He requested, however, that he be exempted from long journeys in winter.

e) Brother Jacob Dörksen requested that because of family circumstances he only be assigned for half the year. It was decided that, considering the circumstances and the wishes of Terek, he nevertheless receive the full salary, but that he only be expected to minister elsewhere for half the year.

f) The Conference treasurer requested that the ministering brothers in the harvest fields report on their work enthusiastically so that more funds will be donated to the treasury.

g) The moderator of the convention, Br. Braun, on behalf of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren congregation, requested that the salary of those appointed for a year be increased from seven hundred rubles to eight hundred rubles. Brother D. Block moved the motion and it was accepted unanimously.

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115 The statement is ambiguous. It is not clear whether the congregations were still expected to reimburse the conference.

## Sessions on May 26, 1912

Brother Gerhard Regehr (Reinfeld) led the introduction with the singing of a hymn, reading from Joshua 1, and prayer. The session began at 9:00 a.m. under the leadership of Br. Herman Neufeld.

The minutes, items 7 and following, were read and accepted unanimously.

### 10. Continuation of Deliberation of Item 9

The chairman of the convention asked whether additional workers should be appointed on an annual salaried basis. Brother Jacob Friesen moved that for now no additional workers be appointed on a yearly basis. This was unanimously accepted.

Brother Johann Neufeld (Naumenkovo) was unanimously appointed as itinerant minister for three months.

The convention recommended that Br. Johann Penner (Millerovo) use his vacation to visit the forestry camps and, where advisable, visit individual congregations. He is to be reimbursed for his ministry.

Brother Gerhard Siemens moved that Br. Abraham Unruh be appointed with Br. Johann Penner to visit the forestry camps and that he also be remunerated for his ministry. This was unanimously approved.

Brother Jacob Wiens proposed additionally that representatives from the congregations visit the forestry camps according to past practice.

It was moved that Br. Johann Schellenberg (Reinfeld) be appointed itinerant minister for three months. This was unanimously accepted.

Brother Jacob Epp (Trubezkoi) and Wilhelm Giesbrecht (Siberia) were also recommended as itinerant ministers for three months.

Brother Isaak Braun moved that Br. Kornelius Klassen likewise be appointed as minister for three months. Brother G. Regehr proposed that the appointment of Br. Klassen be left to the believers in Siberia. This was unanimously accepted.

### Ten-Minute Recess

The session resumed with the hymn, "Du bist meine Sonn' in Freuden."

The congregation at Kulunda requested that a brother from the south visit them.

Brother Jacob Friesen moved that Br. Abraham Wall be commissioned. This was unanimously accepted.

Brother Johann Schellenberg (Reinfeld) was nominated for the congregation at Tschunaievka. This was unanimously approved.



The congregations at Orenburg and Neu Samara requested visits by Br. Herman Neufeld and Br. Jacob Wiens. This was supported and approved.

It was recommended that Br. Jacob Dörksen visit Ufa and Alt Samara. This was unanimously approved.

The congregation in Poland requested a visit by Br. Abraham Friesen. This was approved.

Brother Peter Köhn is to visit the Nikolaipol congregation (Turkestan).

The Missions Committee is to regulate other visits to congregations.

### **Financial Statement**

#### **a) Conference Treasury**

Income	8985.26 Rubles
Expenses	7236.46 "
<b>Balance</b>	<b>1748.80 "</b>

Accounts payable	600.00 "
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<b>Balance May 26</b>	<b>1148.80 "</b>
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Brother Regehr moved to accept the financial report and to thank Br. Block.

The delegates signified their approval by rising.

Because Br. Block was resigning as treasurer after three years of service for various reasons, he moved to appoint Br. Wilhelm Dyck for three years. This was unanimously approved.

#### **b) Education Treasury**

Income	1500.28 rubles
Expenses	840.20 "
<b>Balance in account</b>	<b>660.08 "</b>

The raising of hands signified the unanimous approval of the financial statement.

#### **11. Item 11 of the Agenda**

It was recommended that Br. Abraham Friesen travel to Reinfeld and plan the program for the prayer week with the leaders of the Einlage congregation. The prayer week will be announced in November. This was approved.

The minutes to this point were read and approved.

Brother Peter Görzen adjourned the morning session with prayer.



## Afternoon Session

The session began with a hymn and prayer by Br. H. Braun.

Item 10 of the Agenda: Spiritual training of youth and children within the congregation

Brother K. Fehr expressed the desire of the young women in Orenburg to have a suitable pamphlet to help them deal with the issues at their gatherings.

Brother Braun reported that in many areas special services have been arranged in which the lives of biblical personalities have been discussed and various recommendations have been put forward. This has been a blessing. Brother Jacob Friesen observed that our young church members have too little understanding of baptism, the Lord's Supper, justification, etc. They need to be instructed in this regard. Brother Abraham Martens suggested asking the various congregations to report on how they are dealing with these issues. He then gave a brief report on their method of dealing with the issues. Brother Wilhelm Dyck reported that they had successfully used the Rudnerweide Catechism (which consists of questions and answers) for their youth. Brother Abraham Friesen suggested that our ministers should also think about our young people and their own children in their ministry and to direct themselves more to them. Brother Abraham Kröker reminded the congregation that it should also be especially concerned about our students, who are in grave danger of grasping after forbidden fruit. They also should be offered as much relevant material as possible.

Brother Abraham Friesen moved that several brothers investigate this matter further and find a way to work together intensively at this issue. These brothers should prepare and publish a report. The following brothers were commissioned for this work: Wilhelm Dyck, Johann Penner, Jakob Friesen, Johann Schellenberg, Kornelius Klassen, Johann Töws, and Heinrich Braun.

12. Item 12 of the Agenda: The mission to the heathen in southern India

Brother Abraham Friesen read letters from our missionaries on the field in India. He moved that because the famine there is quite severe, every station receive five hundred rupees for relief. Brother K. Fehr moved to accept this recommendation. This was supported and approved by the convention.

A letter from Brother and Sister Abraham Hübert was read, then one from Brother and Sister H. Unruh. The session thanked them for their detailed reports and requested that Br. Friesen send greetings

according to 1 Cor. 15:58 and Isaiah 35:1.

Brother Johann Wiens reported concerning his work. He stated that it was a great privilege to participate actively in mission work. As a weak young man sent out in the name of Jesus, he was now healthy and able to continue his ministry without interruption. That was a miracle and confirms Jesus' word: "That which is impossible for man, is possible with God." The ministry is not in vain but results in rich blessings.

Brother Kornelius Unruh expressed thanks that he could be active in India for seven and a half years. Only the conviction that God had placed him there sustained him and gave him courage and joy in his ministry. The suspicion with which the heathen regarded missionaries made the work more difficult, but the glory of our King is revealed especially under these circumstances. The influence of the unconverted Europeans is very detrimental for the work of the missionaries. Nevertheless, the heathen show a great deal of trust in the missionaries. He concluded with the comment: "My heart belongs to India!"

The delegates thanked the brothers for their reports and wished them God's richest blessing for the future.

Brother Abraham Friesen moved that the establishment of a new station at our Nalgonda field be approved in principle. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

b) Report of the treasurer of the Foreign [heathen] Missions fund.

Balance from the previous year	9212.67 rubles
Income	18793.97 "
Expenses	14067.07 "
<b>Balance in fund</b>	<b>13939.57 "</b>

Brother P. Görzen opened the evening session with prayer. The minutes of the afternoon session were read.

c) There was some discussion about whether the General Conference would be willing to work co-operatively with the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren in mission work in India. This issue was tabled for now because the session was not fully supportive and because the Mennonite brotherhood was withdrawing the question at this stage.

d) Brother Abraham Friesen moved the approval of the following monies from the remaining funds, for the establishment of a mission station in the Nalgonda field:

This year	5000 rubles
Next 2 years	2500 rubles

This was seconded and approved.

e) Brother Braun read a letter from Sister Anna Nickel. She is making herself available to the Conference for missionary service. The Molotschna congregation has recommended her. Brother Peter Unruh moved that Sister Nickel receive support in her preparation for missionary service and that, if possible, she also be sent abroad. This was approved.

A young brother, Peter Görz, has also announced his candidacy for missionary service. He is presently a student in a Bible school in Berlin. Brother Wiens pointed out that at this time it is absolutely necessary for a missionary candidate to graduate from a recognized institution. Brother Jacob Friesen moved that Br. Peter Görz receive 150 rubles toward his preparation for missionary service. This was unanimously approved.

f) Brother Heinrich Isaak requested support for studies in theology. The Memrik congregation withdrew the request.

g) Brother Abraham Schierling from the Kamenka congregation, who is presently in the forestry service, also requested support for studies. The request was provisionally declined.

h) Anna Baerg of Ignatievka submitted a similar request. The issue was dropped for now.

i) Br. Gerhard Wedel, teacher at Katliarevka, requested support for a six-year study of theology. On a motion by Br. Jacob Friesen, this request was declined.

j) Election of a foreign [heathen] mission committee.

Brother H. Braun was again nominated and unanimously elected on the basis of a vote by raising hands.

The following were elected from the congregations:

Einlage: the brothers Gerhard Regehr and Martin Koslowsky

Friedensfelde: Franz Peters

Crimea: Peter Görzen

Kuban: Kornelius Wiens

Sagradovka: Abraham Regehr

Memrik: Franz Janzen

Nikolaievka: Herman Neufeld

Naumenkova: Gerhard Siemens

Millerovo: Wilhelm Dyck

Molotschna: Abraham Friesen and Jacob Friesen

The question was posed whether two brothers undertaking a



visit to our mission field in India would be timely and profitable.

Brother Johann Isaak moved that the brothers Jacob Wiens and Heinrich Braun make the trip. This was ratified by a majority of twenty votes.

Brother Abraham Kröker moved that no decision be made at this time but that it be considered in the future. This was ratified by a majority of thirty votes.

13. Item 13 of the Agenda: Support for Evangelism in Bulgaria

Brother Gerhard Fröse submitted a report concerning the income and expenditures for support of ministers in Bulgaria. The fund has a deficit of 2022.81 rubles. Brother Herman Neufeld moved to thank Br. Fröse for his work and promise him that the deficit would be covered soon. More interest for the work in Bulgaria should be stimulated in the congregations. This was unanimously approved.

14. Item 14 of the Agenda

The question was raised whether the convention should not meet every three years rather than annually. Brother Jacob Friesen moved that the Conference continue to convene every year as before. This was seconded and ratified.

15. Brother Herman Neufeld moved that the travel expenses of the delegates from Orenburg, Kulunda, Terek and Lugovsk be covered this year from the Conference treasury. This was unanimously approved.

16. The congregation at Suvorovskaia requested financial support from the Conference to build a house of worship.

Brother Reimer moved that the congregation be advised that it solicit funds directly from the congregations. This was accepted.

17. The question of whether it was time to appoint a Conference secretary was discussed. Brother H. Neufeld moved that for now these duties be assigned to the Conference moderator. This was approved.

18. Invitations for the next convention have been received from the Crimea and Waldheim congregations. The convention favors the invitation from the Spat [Crimea] congregation if the government grants the necessary permission.

19. It was moved that two hundred copies of the minutes be printed and that these be sent to the various congregations. This was unanimously approved.

20. It was agreed that all travel expenses incurred by Br. Heinrich Braun as a member of the Mennonite Faith Commission are to be paid by the Conference treasury if they are not covered by other



sources. This was unanimously approved.

The minutes of the evening session were read and approved.

21. Gratitude was expressed as follows:

a) By the visiting delegates to the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church for the warm reception and hospitality;

b) By the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church to the visiting delegates for accepting the invitation and for encouraging the hosts by their visit.

The session was closed by singing, "Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren!" and with prayers from several brothers.

*Raduga Press, Halbstadt, Government of Tavrida.*

## Minutes of the Annual Convention of the United Christian Anabaptist-Mennonite Brethren Church in the Church at Spat May 17 and 18, 1913<sup>116</sup>

1. Introduction by Br. Jakob Hübert, Spat, and song no. 394 (*Glaubensstimme*). Prayer and the reading of 2 Cor. 13:11-13. Brother Hübert greeted the delegates and guests on behalf of the Spat congregation and wished them God's grace. He pointed out that Paul's statement was not only his desire, but also his prayer. So it was also the prayer of the local congregation for the sessions, which would proceed as legally authorized. To work effectively in these days, he stated, we must stand by grace, and the love of God must motivate us. After repeating the theme of the invocation (v. 13), Br. Hübert declared the convention open.

2. Brother Jakob Martens, Bersovka (Gortschakovka congregation) then gave a brief word of encouragement to the assembly based on Philippians 4:23. He emphasized especially the grace of God, which we need daily, which we also presently rejoice in and which we receive constantly if we remain close to God. He pointed out in particular how he repeatedly had experienced this grace of God at school. His desire and prayer to God was that this grace would also rule in our congregations, for it brings growth, healing, cleansing and forms us into the image of Jesus.

The song, "Ach bleib mit deiner Gnade," was sung. Several brothers led in prayer.

3. The list of delegates was presented and the following delegates of the congregations were recognized:

Molotschna congregation: B. Janz, K. Klassen, Klass Ens, David Görzen, Johann Rahn, Isaak Neufeld, Johann Isaak, Aron Willms, Johann Dick, Heinrich Dickmann, Heinrich Braun, Peter Penner, Peter Regehr, Heinrich Köhn and Johann Wiens.

Einlage congregation: Gerhard Regehr, Johann Epp, Martin Koslowsky, Johann Schellenberg and Kornelius Pauls.

Ignatiev congregation: Herman Neufeld, David Block.

<sup>116</sup> *Protokoll der Jahressitzung der Vereinigten Christlichen Taufges. Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinde im Bethause zu Spat am 17. und 18 Mai 1913*. Original at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno, Calif. Copy at CMBS in Winnipeg.

Memrik congregation: Franz Fröse, Franz Goossen and Franz Janzen.

Naumenkov congregation: Gerhard Siemens, Abram Unruh and Gerhard Fröse.

Spat congregation: Abram Friesen, Peter Görzen, Jakob Hübert, Klas Boschmann, Peter Klassen, Johann Dick and Kornelius Unruh.

Millerov congregation: Wilhelm Dyck, Johann Penner.

Kuban congregation: Kornelius Wiens.

Lugov congregation: Abram Martens.

Kamenkov congregation: Kornelius Fehr, Peter Funk.

Ufa congregation: Jakob Martens, Heinrich Thiessen.

Tschunaiev congregation: Johann Heinrichs, Jakob Hübert.

Friedensfeld congregation: Abram Wall, Heinrich Friesen and Jakob Unger.

Tiege congregation (Sagradovka): Johann Nikkel, Abram Regehr, Johann Derksen and Johann Warkentin.

A total of fifty-one delegates.

4. Election of chairman: Brother Heinrich Braun was presented as the candidate, with forty votes, and was then unanimously elected as chairman. Brother G. Regehr was appointed as vice-chairman.

5. Brothers Johann Rahn, Kornelius Klassen, Johann Penner and Johann Schellenberg were appointed as secretaries; the last two were asked to translate the minutes into Russian.

6. Reports of exchange visits to the congregations:

a) Brother Herman Neufeld, Nikolaievka, reported as follows:

Reporting about one's own work is difficult, even more so because one's own assessment is most severe. It is a real privilege and a blessing to visit the congregations. The brothers do not visit the congregations, but the congregations visit each other through the brothers. Guests from afar are always a special event.

Neufeld visited the congregations in the province of Samara and then the Molotschna congregations with Br. G. Siemens. Brother Neufeld also visited the congregation in Fürstenland and others. God had blessed him and comforted him in his ministry. He declared his willingness to continue in this ministry.

b) Brother Abram Wall, Milloradovka, visited the congregations in Siberia. It was not a convenient time to visit because the work on the fields was not yet complete. Also, Br. Jakob Wiens could not accompany him on the trip because his wife was ill. Brother Wall visited the villages in Pavlodar, Barnaul and Omsk.

He proclaimed God's Word, comforted the dying, and rejoiced with the joyful. On his return trip he visited the congregations at Tokuschi and Davlekanovo. He continued to minister in various congregations and the forestry stations. The ministry in the forestry stations was a great blessing and is very necessary. Brother Wall did not feel that he had as much energy as in the past for his ministry. He was not tired of his ministry, however, and intended, the Lord willing, to continue actively for the Lord as he was able. He also assisted the aged Elder Jakob Janz in the ministry in his home congregation.

Brother Heinrich Friesen brought greetings to the delegation from Br. Janz; the delegation responded with a greeting based on Isaiah 40:28-31.

c) Abram Friesen, Spat, was privileged to be able to visit Poland and encouraged the brothers to visit the congregation. Brother Friesen found that the brothers and sisters in Poland are simply but adequately provided for in terms of earthly needs such as food and clothing. He recommended them as a model for us in this respect. Spiritually he found a hunger for God's Word among them. They expressed more gratitude for his visit here than elsewhere. Brother Friesen was especially blessed by the children's worship services, and in the services of young men and women that he conducted there. At such occasions the youth were willing to discuss issues more openly and revealed their spiritual state more freely. Therefore, such services are particularly necessary.

At the close of the morning session the chairman drew attention to the death of our dear missionary, H. Unruh, whom the Lord had taken from his ministry during the past conference year. The delegation honored the memory of the dear brother by rising and singing the song, "Wie wird es sein, wenn endlich nach dem schweren."

Prayer

Two-hour noon recess

### **Afternoon:**

Song: "Herr Du Willst Dein Reich erhalten" and prayer.

The minutes of the morning session were read and unanimously accepted after several corrections.

Continuation of reports concerning exchange visits to the congregations.

d) Brother Unruh reported about his visits to several forestry stations with Br. Johann Penner. The brothers found the young



men to be very receptive listeners. Although the young men had to work hard during the day, they were very alert in the evenings during the Bible studies. They are our brothers, they are in inner agreement with us and they have the same needs that we do. Among them we have sincere, thoughtful, prayerful brothers, who honor the Lord. At the forestry stations we experienced the same friendly hospitality. The Altagerikaia Datscha made a particularly good impression on the brothers. Since this branch of the Berdiansk post does not have its own administrator and the young men have to deal with everything on their own, it was especially gratifying to be received with such self-giving love by the young men. The general impression was good; the future will reveal the results.

e) Brother Johann Schellenberg reported about his ministry, which he had to accomplish without the benefit of an accompanying brother. In the three months of his service, during which time he made many house visitations, he visited many villages and was active in the Lord's vineyard through preaching and exposition of Scripture. During this time he had various experiences and discovered many shortcomings among the people of God. For example, many of God's children are negligent in their duties because they fail to nurture spiritual fellowship; others withdraw because they have offended one another. Br. Schellenberg was particularly blessed because people were studying the inner unity of the Scriptures.

7. Report of the treasurer concerning the Conference treasury:

Account balance, May 27, 1912	712.52
Income to May 17, 1913	4493.85
<b>Total</b>	<b>5206.37</b>

Expenses	4857.00
<b>Balance on hand</b>	<b>349.37</b>

The auditors have examined the account and have verified its accuracy. The delegation expressed satisfaction with the report and accepted it unanimously. The treasurer made the following comments:

When we compare the accounts of the last two years it appears that there has been a reduction. Last year we had approximately two thousand rubles more in expenditures and a similar increase in income. Furthermore, several brothers have not yet received their stipend because there is not enough money in the account. The question therefore arises: how can we determine the reason for this situa-

tion, and how can we resolve it? It was suggested that because the brothers are paid for the various terms of service and the treasurers often find themselves in financial difficulty because the monies are submitted in spring, it might be desirable to submit the monies in two installments, in April and in September.

It was pointed out, however, that many congregations fulfill their obligations once a year and that it would be very difficult to implement a single mode of collecting the monies. Further discussions of this issue led to a strong encouragement to the congregations to participate in financial contributions to the brotherhood treasury.

A motion was then presented to have a special collection in the congregations as soon as possible during the summer, soon after the minutes have been circulated, to cover the shortfall in expenses in the Conference treasury. The motion was seconded and accepted with one dissenting voice.

The second motion, to recommend that congregations have two collections annually (April and September), received only five votes.

The delegation also supported the treasurer's motion that the monies designated for the Conference treasury, with the financial statements, be submitted to the treasurer before the Conference, no later than April.

8. Brother Jakob Dörksen, Terek, ministered elsewhere only for a short time because of illness in the family. Therefore, he declined remuneration beyond the one hundred rubles that he had already received. The delegation nevertheless unanimously decided to grant him another two hundred rubles.

Song: "Stern, auf den schaue," etc. Prayer.

Supper Recess from 3:00 -4:30

Song: "Komm, o komm, Du Geist des Lebens." Prayer.

Brother Gerhard Regehr chaired the session.

9. Compensation for the itinerant preachers.

The delegation felt that 150 rubles was too little for those appointed for three months. The motion to increase the amount to two hundred rubles was unanimously accepted. A motion to appoint brothers for only one or two months or annually, effective in 1914, was also accepted unanimously.

10. Report of the treasurer of the education fund.

Balance on May 27, 1912	660.08
Income to May 17, 1913	465.55
Total	1125.63

Expenses during the year	1067.47
Balance on hand	58.16
Accepted.	

### May 18, Morning.

Song: "Dem König, welcher Blut und Leben."

Brother Fehr read Matthew 28:16-20 and suggested that this last address of Christ is the principle that brings us together in the Lord's work.

The minutes of the previous day, after supper, were read and unanimously accepted.

#### 11. Rearing of children.

After a wide-ranging discussion, two motions were presented:

a) Brother Johann Penner wished to devote himself primarily to youth ministry during his visits to the congregations, and to receive remuneration accordingly afterward.

b) Brother Johann Penner would like to rewrite the Confession of Faith in question and answer form, for use in the instruction of youth. The first motion was accepted by majority vote. The second was defeated.

#### 12. Appointment of itinerant ministers.

a) The following were appointed for one year: Herman Neufeld, Abraham Wall, Jakob Wiens and Peter Köhn.

b) The following brothers from the south were appointed for three months: Johann Schellenberg, Jakob Epp and Johann Neufeld; two brothers in Siberia to be appointed by the local church; one brother from the northeast congregations as determined by the local church.

The congregations are to be visited as follows: Brothers Johann Schellenberg and M. Koslowsky are to travel to Turkestan to visit the congregation. Brother Schellenberg is to visit the congregations in Lugovsk, Mariental, with a local brother.

Brother Herman Neufeld is to visit the Kulunda and Pavlodar congregations with Br. P. Klassen; Br. Herman Neufeld will also visit the forestry stations of Usov and Anadol.

Brother Peter Köhn was asked to visit the congregations in Gortschakovka and Tschunaievka with a local brother; likewise the congregations in Kamenka and area. He also was invited by the Einlage congregation, and was asked to visit the Old and Neu Berdiansk and Altagir forestry stations with Br. Benjamin Janz.



Brother Abram Wall will visit the congregations in Poland; Brother Peter Görzen volunteers to accompany him without remuneration although the Conference will reimburse his travel costs. On the return trip they will visit the forestry stations of Schwarzwald and Scherebkovo. Brother Wall will also visit the congregations in Nikolaievka, Alexanderpol and Naumenkovo.

Brother Abr. Friesen will visit the Philoxera-Komando with Br. Peter Klassen.

Brother Johann Töws (Alexandertal) will visit the forestry stations Razin and Vladimir with Br. Abram Unruh, as well as Trubezkoi and area.

There was a discussion concerning remuneration for Br. Jakob Wiens, and two motions were presented:

a) The Conference pays 650 rubles.

The Siberian church pays 150 rubles.

Total—800 rubles.

b) The Conference pays 400 rubles and the remainder is left to the discretion of the Siberian church.

The first motion was passed and therefore the second was dropped. Closing: Song: "Lasset uns mit Jesu ziehen," etc.

Prayer.

"Die Gnade unseres Herrn Jesu Christi," etc.

*Chairman: H. J. Braun*

*On behalf of the Vice-Chairman: J. J. Hübert*

*Secretaries: K. Klassen*

*Johann Penner*

*Johann Schellenberg*

*Johann Rahn*



# Minutes of the Convention of the United Mennonite Brethren Church

on September 14, 15 and 16, 1918 in Vassilievka, Guvernia Charkov <sup>117</sup>

## First Session on September 14 in the Afternoon

Br. Gerhard Regehr opened the convention with the reading of Ephesians 4:1-6. Br. Regehr strongly emphasized the high value and rich blessings of the "unity of the Spirit" and underlined that this has three bases according to vs. 4-6. The chord of peace binds this unity; therefore we should all earnestly aspire to achieve it!

A general prayer session followed.

1. The following delegates arrived for the convention:

Waldheim: Heinrich Martens, Kornelius Boschmann.

Alexandertal: Johann Penner, Jakob Sudermann, Abraham Klaassen.

Rückenau: Peter Regehr, Heinrich Reimer.

Tiege: Heinrich Lepp, Dietrich Derksen.

Tiegenhagen: Heinrich Braun, David Isaak.

Einlage: Peter Braun, Peter Fröse, Johann Peters, Johann Reimer, Johann Schellenberg, Johann Pauls, Johann Janzen, Gerhard Regehr.

Friedensfeld: Abraham Neustädter, Abraham Wall.

Naumenkovo: Johann Siemens, Peter Siemens, Gerhard Siemens, Johann Pauls, Jakob Friesen, Johann Neufeld.

Nikoloievka: Johann Bückert.

Memrik: Jakob Derksen, Franz Fröse, Jakob Fröse, Franz Janzen.

Herzenberg: David Wiens, Johann Friesen.

Millerovo: Wilhelm Dyck, Franz Isaak.

2. Br. G. Regehr was elected as chairman and Br. Heinrich Braun as his assistant. The following secretaries were appointed: Peter Braun, Osterwick: Peter Siemens, Rerberg; Franz Isaak, Glubokoye; and David Isaak, Halbstadt.

The following were appointed as auditors of the various financial statements: Br. Johann Siemens, Rerberg and Heinrich Martens, Waldheim.

3. Br. H. Braun read the Minutes of the previous session in Waldheim on May 28, 1917 as well as the Minutes of the extended Foreign Missions Committee sessions of June 28, 1918 in Halbstadt.

4. Br. Johann Pauls, Varvorovka, brought greetings from Br. Peter Töws who was ill. Br. D. Isaak also brought greetings from Br. Gerassimenko who lives at Bantyschevo. Since Br. Gerassimenko was anxious to participate in the sessions, Br. Gerhard Siemens was requested to invite him to the convention.

5. Now the Minutes of the meeting of the Foreign Missions Committee on September 20, 1917 at Rerberg were read. The members of the Missions Committee are:

a) G. Regehr, A. Wall, H. Neufeld, G. Fröse, G. Siemens, W. Dyck, Jakob Friesen, Johann Wiens, A. Friesen, H.J. Braun, Franz Janzen, Kornelius Wiens.

b) Newly elected members: K. Pauls from the Einlage congregation, Isaak Neufeld and Heinrich Dück from the Molotschna congregation, Jakob Hübert from the Spat congregation.

(Note also item 4 of the evening session).

## **Second Session, Evening of September 14**

The session opened with the singing of the hymn, "Will ich des Kreuzes Streiter sein?" and prayer by Elder Derksen, Memrik.

1. The treasurer of the Conference account, Elder W. Dyck, gave the financial statement of the Home Missions Fund:

Income	10,451.37 rubles
Expenses	8,413.18 "
<b>Balance</b>	<b>2,038.19 "</b>

Auditors J. Siemens and H. Martens reviewed the statement and found it to be correct. The report was affirmed and approved.

2. Br. Johann Schellenberg reported on the status of the Education Fund. The income from 1917 to 1918 at the present time totals 1,735.54 rubles. The expenses were 667.00 rubles. The balance remaining is 1,068.54 rubles.

The report was affirmed and accepted.

3. The treasurer of the Foreign Missions fund, H. J. Braun, indicated that since his report at the Missions Committee meeting on June 28, 1918 no major changes had taken place and that the fund presently stands at about 60,000 rubles. Then he encouraged the congregations to continue to collect funds. Because no funds can be sent to our missionaries and the Boston Missions Committee is now supporting them, we are incurring a debt of 20,000 annually to them so

that after four years we will have to pay them 80,000 rubles. Br. Braun also reported that on the basis of a decision at the sessions on May 28 and 29, 1917 in Waldheim, the Missions funds were to be deposited in a bank in the name of the Committee, but because of circumstances this had not yet become possible. The administration of the Molotschna Mutual Aid Society had decided in principle to accept our funds, but still wished to deliberate further on the issue.

Then two letters from missionary Kornelius Unruh and Brother and Sister Abraham Hübert from India were read. According to them the Boston Committee is treating the missionaries as though they were their own and will support them as long as possible. The missionaries are enjoying God's rich blessings in their work so that it has become necessary to establish another four extension stations, although the funds are presently not adequate. They send hearty greetings to all the congregations.

The delegation gratefully received the report by Br. H. Braun.

#### 4. Russian-Bulgarian Mission

Since the treasurers of the other mission funds were elected for three years at the convention in Waldheim and the treasurers for the Education Fund and the Russian-Bulgarian Mission were only appointed for one year, the latter were requested to continue their duties for another two years. This relates to Brothers Johann Schellenberg for the Education Fund and Gerhard Fröse for the Russian-Bulgarian Missions Fund. All treasurers of the various funds are members of the Missions Committee.

Regarding the designation, "Russian-Bulgarian Mission," it was decided to change it to "Russian-Bulgarian Evangelism" work in the future even though, for the time being, Bulgaria is excluded.

The delegation gladly received the reports of several brothers regarding the open doors for evangelism in Russia, as well as reports of the richly blessed mission work of various groups of believers. It acknowledged that a united effort by all Mennonite believers for the massive divinely willed work of evangelism in Russia is very desirable. The delegation was confident that God would provide this unity in the future and trusted that the congregations would be open to this at all times. The "Lichtfelde" and "Altonau Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood" were invited to join in the work of evangelization that had been begun.

5. The support of the missionary widow, Sister Unruh, was discussed. The delegation agreed to increase the support by 1,100 rubles in 1918-19 because of the increase in her rent from 400 to 1500 rubles.



6. Salaries for itinerant ministers.

All the brothers who have been appointed for one month will receive 150 rubles and those appointed for two months will receive 350 rubles.

7. Printing of Russian Testaments.

A year and a half ago the Conference decided to sponsor the publication of Russian Bibles. This project, according to the report by W. Dyck, has prospered. The various Mennonite congregations have donated about 30,000 rubles and as a result 50,000 Russian Bibles have been printed and distributed by the British Bible Society. The question now is, since the hunger for the Word of God is even more strongly evident, whether it is our duty to sponsor the printing of 150,000 - 200,000 Russian [New] Testaments together with the Psalms. This matter received a favorable response and the Conference decided to elect three additional brothers to the Commission (which presently consists of Brothers W. Dyck, Millerovo; Isaac Neufeld, Waldheim; and Abraham Kröcker, Halbstadt). This Commission was instructed to take the necessary steps to collect the finances with guarantees by the Conference and to have the Testaments printed as soon as possible. The following were elected as additional members of the Commission: Br. Wilhelm Friesen, Millerovo; G. Regehr, Nikopol; and Gerhard Fröse, Barvenkovo.

This Commission was therefore authorized to receive contributions and write receipts, negotiate loans, make agreements and contracts in undetermined amounts, to sign them as fully authorized by the Conference and to travel. In short, they are to undertake and complete everything that is necessary to expedite the resolution in the name of the Conference according to their best judgment. The Conference wished them every success and God's richest blessing!

The session concluded with the singing of the hymn, "Auf, denn die Nacht wird kommen" and prayer by Br. H. Braun.

### **Third Session, Morning of September 15**

Introduction by Br. Jakob Hübert, Spat, with the hymn, "Auf zum Werk" and the reading of the Gospel of John 9:1-5.

The first section of the Minutes was read and approved.

1. The issue of state service.

It was pointed out that the issue of state service has still not been clarified. It would be desirable to have this clarified as soon as possible in order to submit concrete proposals to the government. Br. H. Braun



moved that the delegation ask the Commission for Church Affairs and the Menno Centre to prepare a proposal for a form of state service which is compatible with the confession of our fathers concerning nonresistance.

The motion was voted on and accepted. The chairman of the Conference was instructed to submit this request.

Br. W. Dyck reported that the Commission for Church Affairs intends to send several representatives to Kiev to lay the groundwork for the proposal.

2. Concerning the issue which was raised at the last session about mission among Moslems and among the heathen in Russia, on the basis of the motion by Br. W. Dyck, Br. Gerhard Fröse was requested to receive monies for both and to be a trustee of the funds.

3. The elected secretary, Br. Peter Siemens, reported that he was ill. Br. Wilhelm Dyck was elected to replace him.

4. Br. Gerassimenko reported concerning his work. He had to leave Bulgaria during the war. At present he is working in Russia in various cities and locations. He lived in Kharkov for a considerable time and labored there. Recently he accepted a position in Bantyschevo and had a blessed ministry there. Approximately 30 souls have been baptized there. He expressed gratitude for the confidence that the Mennonite Brethren Church had extended to him thus far and for the support that he had received. He is willing to continue to work under the mandate of the Conference.

After discussion of the issue, the delegation decided not to support Br. Gerassimenko as the leader of a congregation but to appoint him as an independent evangelist.

Br. G. Regehr moved to appoint Br. Gerassimenko as our Bulgarian Conference missionary with the salary of an itinerant minister of our Conference for the purpose of "free" evangelism in Russia.

This was seconded and unanimously ratified.

5. A letter from Br. Herman Neufeld greeting the delegated brethren on the basis of 2 Cor. 13:11-13 was read. Br. Neufeld could not be present because of illness.

6. Appointment of Br. Jakob Fröse. Br. Fröse visited the following congregations in response to the decision of the meeting early in the year: Molotschna, Nikopol, Sagradovka, Steinfeld, etc. He did not visit all areas because the summer was not a very suitable time. He reported that he had become involved in the work of evangelism after 1906. Then personal circumstances made it necessary for him to discontinue for a lengthy period. Now, however, he felt compelled to

make himself and his wife available to the Conference for this work.

Various impressions were shared concerning the impact that Br. Fröse had at various places. These were generally good. The difficult aspects of an itinerant minister's calling were noted and the need to support an itinerant minister in every way was emphasized, especially in relation to the family. Br. D. Isaak then moved as follows: That Br. J. Fröse be appointed for one year as our worker with full salary primarily for the purpose of evangelism among the Russians.

The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

The Conference expressed its support for Br. Fröse's work in tent evangelism which he was requested to engage in during the summer.

The session concluded with singing and prayer.

#### **Fourth Session, Afternoon of September 15**

Introduction by Br. Dörksen with the hymn, "So Lange Jesus bleibt der Herr" and with prayer.

1. Designation of brothers appointed for one or two months.

The following brothers were nominated for this work:

Memrik congregation: Jakob Dörksen, Franz Fröse, each for one month;

Einlage congregation: Johann Schellenberg, K. Pauls, Abraham Quiring, Jakob Dyck, Peter Braun, each for one month;

Tiege congregation: Benjamin Janzen for the summer and Dietrich Dörksen for two months.

Halbstadt congregation: David Isaak, Kornelius Klassen, Johann Klassen, each for one month.

Friedensfeld: Abraham Neustädter, Franz Peters each for one month.

Naumenkovo: Johann Neufeld for two months, Johann Pauls and Gerhard Siemens for one month.

Nikolaieva congregation: Peter Janzen and Peter Klassen, each for one month.

Crimea congregation: Peter Görzen for two months, Klaas Boschmann, Abraham Kröker, Lustigstaal, and Jakob Hübert, each for one month.

Rückenau: Heinrich Dück, Peter Bärger, Peter Regehr, Abraham Willms, each for one month.

Alexandertal: Johann Töws and Abraham Klassen, each for one month.

Sagradovka: Johann Bärger, Bernhard Hamm, Abraham Regehr

and Johann Warkentin, each for one month.

Herzenberg: David Wiens for one month.

2. Areas to be visited by these brothers:

a) The following brothers are appointed to Millerovo: Benjamin Janz, Johann Töws and Abraham Wall.

b) Ignatiev and Alexandropol: Franz Peters, Abraham Neustädter and two brothers from the Sagradovka congregation.

c) Memrik: Abraham Klassen, D. Derksen and Abraham Wall.

d) Borissovo, Naumenkovo and Barvenkovo: Jakob Derksen, Johann Schellenberg and A. Quiring.

e) Wiesenfeld, Herzenberg, Andreasfeld, Sovievka and Jakovlevo: Peter Braun, Herman Neufeld and Jakob Epp from Trubetzkoie.

f) Schönwiese, Kronsweide, Neuenburg and Einlage: Herman Neufeld.

g) Nikolaipol Volost: Peter Görzen and Klass Boschmann.

h) Kronstal, Rosental and Burwalde: Heinrich Dück, Peter Bergen, Johann Pauls and Johann Neufeld.

i) Friedensfeld and Hebrew Colony: Kornelius Pauls, Jakob Dück, David Isaak and Johann Klaassen.

j) Nikopol and Fürstenland: Herman Neufeld, Abraham Kröker (Crimea) and Jakob Hübert (Spat).

k) Miloradovka, Steinfeld and area: Franz Töws, David Wiens and Jakob Epp.

l) Sagradovka: Dietrich Derksen, Peter Görzen and Herman Neufeld.

m) Crimea: Kornelius Klassen, Kornelius Boschmann and Abraham Wall.

n) Waldheim and Fürstenau circuit: Peter Regehr, Abraham Willms, Peter Klassen and Peter Janzen.

o) Rückenau: Herman Neufeld, Jakob Fröse and Johann Regehr.

p) Tiegenghagen and Tiege: Gerhard Siemens and Johann Neufeld.

q) Sparrau and Alexandertal: Abraham Regehr, Johann Bargaen and Franz Fröse.

r) Schönfelde Volost, Slavgorod (Gouv. Jekater.): two Sagradovka brothers.

s) Poltava (Vessieliaia Podol): Franz Fröse.



### 3. The Bible School

At the extended Missions Committee meeting in Halbstadt the decision was made to establish a Bible school under the leadership of missionary Johann Wiens. Br. Johann Wiens reported that more than 25 applications have been received and that he would not be able to manage the task by himself. Either another teacher would have to be appointed or at least one-half of the students would have to be refused admission. Br. Dyck read a letter from Br. Benjamin Janz according to which the Tiege congregation requested Br. Dyck to lay the Bible school on the hearts of the delegates so that if at all possible all students might be admitted. Another teacher should be appointed because Br. Johann Wiens could not manage by himself. Br. W. Dyck further reported that Br. H. Braun would be willing to accept a position this winter. Br. Braun stated that after lengthy consideration and for the good of the cause he was willing to accept the position for a trial period of six months. The delegation expressed its desire that the Bible school be established and that Br. Braun accept the position and voted to appoint him. Br. H. Braun is to receive the salary of an itinerant minister for this work. The tuition for a course is established at 100 rubles per year.

Br. David Isaak moved that the salaries for the brothers H. Braun and Johann Wiens be paid from the Conference treasury and that the other expenses of the Bible school be paid from the Education Fund.

This was unanimously accepted.

### 4. The Conference Treasury

The demands on our Conference treasury are high in this missions year. The contributions in recent years have been very parsimonious. We all need to show more commitment. The decision of the delegation in Waldheim, that the regional treasurers pay the brothers and then submit the bills to the head treasurer so that he always has a true picture and can provide a statement of all the accounts of the Conference treasury, has proven to be impractical. In most cases the statements were not submitted.

Br. H. J. Braun moved that all funds pertaining to this be sent to the Conference treasurer, Br. W. Dyck, Millerovo, and that he be given the assignment to pay the annual itinerant ministers and other Conference workers in advance every three months.

The motion was seconded and unanimously accepted.

5. Br. Johann Wiens read a recommendation of the Alexandertal congregation concerning Br. David Dürksen (from Alexandertal) who requested that he be financially supported by the Conference as a



missionary student. On the basis of a previous Conference decision, the Conference was not willing to accept any missionary students for training. Since the congregation's recommendation on behalf of the brother is very positive, however, Br. Franz Isaak moved that the brother David Dürksen enter Bible school like all other students (i.e., that he pay his own expenses), but that the Missions Committee deliberate later regarding his missionary service.

This was seconded and unanimously accepted.

6. God willing, next year's convention will take place in Katliarevka (Memrik) in May on the basis of the invitation of the Katliarevka congregation.

The local congregation is asked to determine the dates in good time and to send invitations to the congregations.

7. The following program is agreed to for Sunday:

Opening service to begin at 8:30 a.m. Prayer meeting to be led by Br. Jakob Derksen, Memrik. This is to be followed by sermons by brothers H. Braun and Johann Wiens.

Afternoon: Sermons by brother Wilhelm Dyck and H. Reimer.

Evening: Sermons by brothers Abraham Wall and Peter Regehr.

8. Br. W. Dyck moved to accept the Minutes. This was seconded and accepted.

9. 100 copies of the Minutes are to be printed.

The delegation expressed gratitude to the hosts for their kind hospitality.

The Naumenkovo congregation expressed gratitude for the confidence that had been placed in it and for the visit by the delegates.

Greetings from the following brethren were extended to the delegation: Jakob Siemens, K. Pauls, P. Wiebe and Herman Konrad.

The delegation expressed gratitude for the greetings and returned greetings based on Romans 8:17-18 and Psalms 126:5-6.

Br. A. Wall then announced the death of the minister G. Dück, Milloradovka. In grateful remembrance of the departed minister, David G. [sic], the congregation rose and sang the hymn, "Sehn wir uns an jenem Ufer."

*Chairman: Gerhard Regehr*

*Assistant Chairman: H. J. Braun*

*Secretaries: Franz Isaak, D. Isaak*



## **Part IV**

# **Identity, Relationships and Recognition**





## Differences Between the United Mennonite Brethren Churches, the Baptist Churches and Old Mennonite Churches (1876, 1908)<sup>118</sup>

### I Differences between the United Mennonite Brethren Churches and the Baptist Churches

a) The Baptists permit the use of the sword, which our church does not regard as scriptural;

b) The Baptists permit the swearing of the oath in situations which demand it that our church regards as contradicting (James 5:12);

c) The Baptists do not practice foot washing, which our church practices.

Generally, however, we regard the Baptist church as a genuine church. It is a fellowship of true children of God who are born again and have received the Holy Spirit, and these differences from our Confession of Faith do not hinder us from experiencing intimate fellowship with them, from breaking bread in fellowship with them, or even from having their ministers with us for periods of time to regulate church affairs. The basis for this is as follows:

a) Apart from the three issues named above, they profess the same faith;

b) They baptize only born-again believers by immersion in water according to the Word of God;

c) They excommunicate, for an indefinite period, members who do not live circumspectly until a real change and improvement is noted;

d) Their church order is essentially the same as ours

<sup>118</sup> These were originally published by Abraham Unruh under the title, "Verschiedenheiten zwischen den vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden und den Baptistengemeinden sowie den alten Mennonitengemeinden" as an appendix to the *Glaubens-Bekennniß und Verfassung der gläubigen und vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde im Südlichen Russland* (Einlage, 1876), pp. 56–64. In 1908 Heinrich Epp published a separate pamphlet under the title, *Verschiedenheiten* – with an additional preface entitled, "Vorwort zur zweiten Auflage" (Odessa, 1908).

*NB: In contrast to this the other Mennonite church is spiritually dead and tolerates the godless, drunkards and scoffers in contradiction to the Holy Scripture (I Cor. 5:11).*

## **II Main reasons why we left the General Mennonite Churches**

Since our people's behavior and lifestyle is very inconsistent with the existing confession, we profess the Mennonite church to be spiritually dead. Because of this we feared the judgment of God and the disfavor of our highest authorities, since we immigrated to Russia as a quiet and peaceful people. Convicted by the Word of God, we exposed their godless life. To some extent we were excommunicated by them and to some extent we departed from them. Therefore, we found it necessary to establish our own church. Then the Church Council of the Molotschna and Chortitza Mennonites (except for two elders) tried to expel us not only from their own organization but also from the colonies. Nevertheless, we survived as a church under God's protection and the favor of our highest authorities, and enjoyed freedom under the same, with a few exceptions.

## **III Main issues on which we differ from the other Mennonites**

### **1. Accepting Members into the Church**

Among other Mennonites baptism and acceptance into membership is based on a memorized confession, without examination of the condition of the heart and, as a rule, occurs between the ages of eighteen and twenty. In our church an individual may only be accepted into membership on the following conditions:

- a) If the individual has given a voluntary testimony of his faith to the gathered church;
- b) If the church is persuaded on that basis that the individual has experienced a real change of heart, such as Jesus referred to in John 3: "Unless one is born anew," etc.
- c) If the individual's daily life is consistent with the confession.

### **2. Baptism**

Whereas other Mennonites baptize by pouring, among us baptism by immersion is the only mode. The candidate is baptized in clean garments to prevent offence against indecency.

3. a) Among other Mennonites only harlots and occasionally drunkards are excommunicated. By contrast, the godless, the scoffers and the greedy are tolerated. Among us, not only are

those named above excommunicated but also all those who are living disreputable lives.

b) Among other Mennonites excommunication is usually for only fourteen days, whereas among us the time depends on improvement in behavior and genuine remorse about wrongdoing. The excommunicated person may attend the worship services to hear the Word of God, and he is admonished to repent and return to God and the church.

## Introduction to the Confession of Faith of 1900<sup>119</sup>

The "Confession of Faith" that follows is a short summary of the essential tenets of faith and doctrinal teachings gleaned from the Holy Scriptures and the earlier confessional statements laid down by the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church. It details how this church agrees with other Christian churches or differs from them.

The earlier confessional statements referred to are: 1) "The Founding Document" of the Brethren from the Molotschna District, January 6, 1860; 2) "The Answers" of the Brethren from the Chortitza District, May 7, 1862; 3) The "Confession of the United Flemish, Frisian and High German Anabaptist Mennonite Church, published by the Rudnerweide Church in South Russia, 1853"<sup>120</sup> (called the Kronsweider and Rudnerweider Confession). The Mennonite Brethren Church designated this confession its own from the beginning (according to documents of January 1, 1861, November 12, 1862, and June 1868, in the archives of the Mennonite Brethren Church); 4) "Abridged Statement of the Rules and Regulations of our Church," presented by Heinrich Huebert, elder of the Mennonite Brethren in the Molotschna in June, 1868; and 5) "Confession of Faith and Constitution of the Baptized Believers and United Mennonite Brethren Church in Southern Russia" in 1873, published in 1876 by A. U. (Abraham Unger, elder of the Brethren Church of the Chortitza District).

In formulating this "Confession of Faith," the following have been carefully considered<sup>121</sup> (in keeping with the Scripture: "Test

119 *Glaubensbekenntnis der Vereinigte Christlichen Taufgesinnten Mennonitschen Brüdergemeinde in Russland* (Halbstadt, 1902), 3–9.

120 The "Frisian" churches of West Prussia (1895) and Russia (Kronsweider and Rudnerweider Church in 1898), recently replaced this very old Confession, also known as the "Frisian," with a confession originally compiled by the "Flemish" churches (Chortitzer, Lichtenauer, and others), in which the Frisian and Flemish, which agree in all the essentials, are merged. Thus both of the old confessions (the Fr. and the Fl.) have been given the status of revered historical/theological source material, and retain their great value for us – next to the writings of Menno and others – as the faith and doctrinal statements of our ancestral teachers and (to some extent) martyr-fathers (Heb. 13:7), though never equal with Holy Scripture.

121 In addition to other evangelical (i.e., Mennonite, Baptist, Elberfeld, Herrnhut, Methodist, Reformed, Lutheran) and eastern confessional and doctrinal statements by the consultant.



everything and retain the good"): (1) The three oldest and most revered symbols (confessions) of the post-apostolic church, known as (a) the Apostolic, (b) the Nicene, and (c) the Athanasian; (2) The "Articles of Faith of the Mennonites or Anabaptists" by Cornelis Ris, approved by many Dutch Mennonite churches in 1773 (using the German edition of the Mennonite pastor C. H. A. van der Smitten, 1895); (3) "The Shorter Catechism"<sup>122</sup> and "The Formular," also published by the Rudnerweide Church in 1853; (4) The "Catechism . . . published by the Christian Anabaptist Churches in Russia, known as Mennonites," commonly used by the Mennonites in Russia; (5) "The Confession of Faith of the Mennonites in Prussia and Russia"<sup>123</sup> printed in Berdiansk in 1874.

That which the Mennonite Brethren Church has always maintained is repeated today: our new organization did not dissolve the confessional fellowship with the Mennonite Anabaptist churches in Russia in 1860; the organization of our Brethren Church was a protest against the ecclesiastical practice of the church referred to, especially regarding baptism and church discipline, and continues to this day, despite the heartfelt brotherly fellowship that we enjoy with many of them. Doctrinal differences, especially regarding military service, prevent the amalgamation of the Mennonite Brethren Church with the other evangelical Anabaptist churches, in spite of their confessionally sound apostolic ecclesiastical practice and baptism and our heartfelt interaction with them.

Possibly more than ever, the Mennonite Brethren Church today is conscious of its occasional erring and shortcomings before God and men. As before, it wishes to foster spiritual fellowship with all believers, and it longs for the realization of the holy will of our Lord and Savior, "That they all may be one." Nevertheless, this divinely approved effort must be coupled with unshakable clinging to the knowledge and task that the Lord graciously committed to us, to restore everything within our power to "as it was in the beginning" in the apostolic Church. The Mennonite Brethren Church does not want to sin against biblical truth, nor add anything to it, or subtract from it. We pray for the gracious, infallible leading of the Holy Spirit, an unshakable, faithful adherence to the old recognized truths, and growth in our still deficient knowledge (Phil. 3:12-16).

The Confession of Faith evolved as follows. Almost from the

<sup>122</sup> No longer in use.

<sup>123</sup> A reprint of the old "Flemish" confession already referred to.

publication of the 1873 "Confession of Faith," under considerable pressure (only a small part of which originated with us) the churches sensed some uneasiness, not with the truths expounded therein, but with a certain one-sided manner of expression, that surfaced here and there, especially in explaining the differences between the Mennonite Brethren and the other churches. In May 1898 the General Conference finally assigned the review of the Confession to a few brethren. They received a mandate to consider all its published statements from the beginning, as well as the present theological stance and the current needs, and to make suggestions in this regard. After several attempts at revision, which proved impossible, one of these brethren drafted a totally new version in February 1900. This was a final attempt to include the total, substantive teachings of all the above-named confessional statements of the Mennonite Brethren Church, in the framework of the so-called Kronsweider and Rudnerweider Confession referred to earlier (which was the first official Confession of the Brethren), taking the necessary liberty in style and order of articles. The intention was to state the basic doctrines of Christianity briefly and tastefully and yet sufficiently clearly, omitting many of the detailed statements of the 1873 Confession of Faith, and, as much as is possible in a brief summary, using Scripture from the common German translation. When, due to the richness of the scriptural text regarding individual truths that was not possible, one or more Scripture references were listed for each expression. These references to Scripture appear in the text, not under the text. This will indicate that the Confession of Faith is to be understood in the way that the inspired Word of God states those respective truths. Our Confession of Faith does not stand next to, but rather under Scripture.<sup>124</sup>

One brother submitted the draft to most of the elders (all those who could be reached within the limited time) and other members of the Brethren Church for their examination and written, critical comments. In substantive matters, all readers gladly approved the draft. Then some twenty brethren, an independent commission of elders, ministers and other representatives from the churches, met for a general revision on May 17 and 18, 1900.

124 The Scripture references prefaced by "as we read," "as the Scripture teaches," "according to the teaching of the Lord Jesus and His apostles," or that are underlined and set off by quotation marks, are not to be taken as substantiating, explanatory or corrective quotations, but as direct confessional statements. It is assumed that the confession can only be read and understood in conjunction with the Holy Scriptures from which it originates and into which it shall lead.

After some recommendations, this commission approved the teaching of this Confession of Faith unanimously and recommended it to the General Conference, which unanimously endorsed it on May 19. It appointed a new, official commission for a final revision of the Confession and for recommendation to the individual churches. The latter commission worked through this project beginning June 6 and decided to present it again to a meeting of brethren – elders, ministers and committee members – who were meeting regarding another church matter on June 20. The sixteen brethren present unanimously approved, signed, and recommended the manuscript to the churches for adoption.

May God bless this work, done in weakness, for the honor of His Name and the advancement of the church!

In repeated meetings the following representatives of churches have expressed their approval of this Confession: Elder David Schellenberg of the Molotschna church; Rev. David Görtzen; Rev. Jakob Friesen; committee member Heinrich Suckau; ministerial candidate Heinrich Braun; Rev. Isaak Fast, Memrik;<sup>125</sup> Rev. Dietrich Friesen, Herzenberg; Rev. Peter M. Friesen, Sevastopol, author. Churches of the Chortitza District: Elder Aron Lepp; Rev. Johann Friesen, Einlage; Rev. Martin Koslowsky; Rev. Cornelius Fehr;<sup>126</sup> Rev. Gerhard Siemens; Rev. Wilhelm Dyck; Rev. Herman Neufeld; committee member Cornelius Reimer, Wiesenfeld. Kuban Church: Elder Daniel Fast and Elder Christian Schmidt. Friedensfeld Church and Sagradovka: Elder Jakob Jantz; Rev. Heinrich Friesen; Deacon Peter Funk. Committee member Johann Philip Isaak; Rev. Abraham Wall; presiding minister Isaak Regehr. Sagradovka; Deacon Abraham Regehr; Rev. Peter Thielmann. Churches in the Crimea: Elder David Dürksen; Rev. Jakob Kröker. Missionaries of the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia in Nalgonda, Dekan, India: Elder Abraham Friesen, Elder Abraham Hübert and Elder Heinrich Unruh (via written approval).<sup>127</sup>

125 The affiliated group at Memrik became an independent congregation in fall, 1900, and Br. Isaac Fast is the elder.

126 Elder of the Kamenka congregation in the Orenberg District since June, 1901.

127 The final acceptance of the "Confession" on the part of the individual churches is indicated by signature and seal at the end of the Confession. 18. Draft of Statutes of the Foreign Mission Committee.



## Draft of Statutes of the Foreign Missions Committee of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia 1904<sup>128</sup>

### A. The Committee

1. Name: The committee shall be called, "Foreign Missions Committee of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia."

2. Purpose: The purpose of the committee is to direct the work of foreign missions of the Mennonite Brethren Church.

3. Membership: The committee shall consist of two organizations: (a) the main or leading committee in Russia, and (b) the sub-committee in India. The main committee in Russia shall consist of twelve persons, elected for three-year terms by secret ballot by the southern churches. After the first and second years respectively, one-third of the terms shall expire by lot and shall be replaced by new elections. The terms of the remaining members shall expire after three years and thus for each of the three years. Those whose terms have expired may be reelected.

The committee shall elect the following by ballot: (a) chairman; (b) vice-chairman; (c) secretary; (d) a vice-secretary

The chairman, secretary and treasurer shall form the executive of the committee.

The treasurer and vice-treasurer shall be elected by secret ballot for three years by the General Conference and shall not represent particular churches on the committee.

4. Rights: The Committee shall have full juridical rights and shall possess its own seal with the inscription: "Missions Committee of the Mennonite Brethren Churches in Russia." A quorum consists of two-thirds of its membership. A two-thirds majority vote of those present is required to pass any motions.

<sup>128</sup> Translated from "Statuten-Entwurf des Heidenmissions-Komitees der Menn. Brüdergemeinden Russlands." (n.d.) Copy at CMBS in Winnipeg. Sections "A" and "B" appear in A.H. Unruh, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde*, 328ff. A version of Section "C" is published in G. W. Peters, *Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1984), 207-208. The version used in this translation appears to be later and may have been the final version, because parts of the amendment at the end of Peter's text appear to be incorporated into the main document. There are also other differences in the two versions. On the various negotiations extending over a period of more than a year, see Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans and Telugus: The Mennonite Brethren Mission in India 1885 - 1975* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 1997), ch.2. Penner indicates that the negotiations continued until late in 1905, but does not cite this particular document in his discussions.



5. The executive officers of the committee shall be authorized: (a) to sign all acts such as contracts, agreements, purchase orders, and other duties up to the maximum sum determined by the Conference and to confirm them with the seal of the committee, and (b) to receive and receipt willed estates, funds, gifts, etc.

Documents of the committee shall only be valid and binding when signed by the members of the executive or their representatives and if they carry the seal of the committee. Checks require only two signatures, namely those of the treasurer and one member of the executive. Receipt of postal notices and registered correspondence in the name of the committee requires the signature of only one member of the executive.

6. Duties of the Committee: The committee shall:

a. receive and examine applications of candidates for mission service, make recommendations for changes in the implementation of the missions program, accept proposals for opening new mission stations, examine them and prepare recommendations for the next convention respecting the same;

b. awaken and nurture mission interest in our churches;

c. remain in close contact with the mission fields in order to be well informed about the situation in our mission fields; and

d. present a detailed report to the Conference annually about the committee's activity, and about the developments and status of our mission in general.

7. The executive of the committee shall supervise the entire mission work of the conference churches, including implementing the decisions of the committee, drawing up contracts and presentations of all kinds in the name of and with the understanding of the committee, administering mission funds through the treasurer and presenting a detailed financial report and a proposed budget for the next year to the conference for approval. The fiscal year shall begin May 1 and end April 30 of the following year.

8. The chairman shall call meetings of the committee as necessary, at least twice a year, to chair the meeting, to inform the committee about all matters concerning the mission and to ensure that the necessary decisions are made. Minutes shall be taken at all meetings.

*Notes:*

1. *It is recommended that a meeting of the committee take place at the time of the general convention to enable a representative of each church to attend in a consultative capacity.*

2. *Upon written request of three or four members, a special meeting of the committee shall be called.*

9. The secretary shall record minutes at the committee meetings, correspond with the committee in Boston and with the missionaries on the field in consultation with the executive, receive mail, send the minutes to the committee members and file all committee documents.

10. The treasurer shall enter all receipts and expenditures in a current account, send the necessary funds to India semiannually as directed by the executive, deposit all monies in a bank and present an audited account to the committee and to the conference. The fiscal year shall conclude annually on April 30.

11. Auditing of financial accounts. The auditing commission, which shall consist of three persons who are not members of the committee, shall be elected annually by the General Conference, also for three-year terms. The commission shall audit the receipts and expenditures of the treasury in detail, check the vouchers and present the minutes of their findings to the General Conference.

### **B. The Sub-Committee**

12. The sub-committee in India shall consist of all the missionaries in the field.

*NOTE: During furlough the missionary shall be a member of the committee in Russia.*

13. The sub-committee shall conduct the mission in India according to the directions of the committee in Russia; it shall submit its recommendations and requests regarding leadership of the mission in Telugu territory to the committee in Russia and submit a budget proposal to the same for approval at the beginning of the fiscal year.

14. The sub-committee in India, through its members, shall administer all mission funds received through public appeals from friends of the mission or the committee in Russia for the support of the work in India in general or for designated projects. For mission building projects or institutions, the sub-committee in India shall submit the plans and projected costs to the committee in Russia for approval. A semi-annual financial report shall be sent to the committee in Russia.

15. Brothers and sisters who are prompted by the love of God to volunteer for missionary service, who evidence the necessary spiritual maturity, who enjoy the confidence of the Conference, who have the necessary natural gifts, who have received appropriate training and are medically certified to be in good health, shall be accepted as missionaries by the General Conference.

16. All missionaries and single sisters shall, without exception,

pass at least two Telegu language examinations.

17. Furnishings. A missionary couple shall receive five hundred rubles for furnishings at the beginning of their first assignment; single brothers and single sisters shall receive 250 rubles. The committee in Russia shall cover the missionaries' passport expenses.

18. Salaries. The salary of a missionary couple during the first three years shall be 1600 rubles. During the following period until the tenth year, the annual salary shall be increased by 400 rubles, and for the following ten years, another 400 rubles. Housing and travel shall be provided free to the missionaries. The missionaries shall bear the costs of travel in the interest of health, doctors, medicine, furniture and other domestic matters.

*Notes:*

*1. Under special circumstances, the committee is prepared to consider unusual circumstances and needs of individual families.*

*2. During furlough, the missionaries shall receive the same salary as itinerant ministers. The mission treasury shall cover missionary travels at home. All mission funds given to the missionaries during their travels shall be submitted to the treasurer in Russia.*

19. Amendments to the constitution may be made any time, based on a two-thirds majority of the conference.

## **C. Appendix: Relationship to Boston**

20. Members of the Mennonite Brethren churches recommended by the Committee in Russia for appointment as missionaries of the American Baptist Missionary Union [ABMU] shall be accepted by the Executive Committee of the ABMU in Boston for service in South India if the means available to the Church in Russia for the work justify such an appointment.

21. Missionaries appointed by the Mennonite Brethren Church may be sent to any station in South India; nevertheless, preference shall be given to work in Deccan.

22. The Advisory Committee of the Telegu Mission shall recommend the funds to be allocated to this work and the Executive Committee in Boston shall make the final decision.

23. The Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia shall cover all the expenses of the work by the missionaries (evangelism, Bible women, etc.). The money shall be sent in advance, semiannually, to the committee in India. The Mennonite Brethren Church shall also send one-half of the salary for each missionary to the treasurer in Boston.

24. The Executive Committee of the ABMU shall pay one-half



of the salary of the Mennonite Brethren missionaries and shall provide a residence for each of these missionaries in the same way that it provides for other missionaries of the Union. The committee in Boston shall pay one-half of the salary of the missionaries. This shall continue during the missionary's furlough at home.

25. The Mennonite Brethren Church shall pay the cost of transportation to India. The committee in Boston shall pay the cost of return passage to Russia.

26. The funds required for buildings (other than missionary residences—see #14) may be secured either by appeal to friends in Russia or elsewhere, or by appropriation by the Executive Committee in Boston as is most appropriate in each case. Each case shall be the responsibility of the Executive Committee in Boston.

27. Provision for the needs of aged missionaries without means, or for families left without means by the death of a missionary, shall be on the same basis as for other missionaries of the Union. Not less than one-half shall be provided by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Russia.

28. The status of missionaries serving the Union under this agreement shall be the same as that of other missionaries of the Union; that is, the Executive Committee in Boston shall regard these brethren as representatives of the ABMU and of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia.



## Mennonites or Baptists?<sup>129</sup>

### Historical Evidence by H. J. Braun, Minister of the Mennonite Brethren Church 1910

Repeatedly this question has emerged during the first fifty years of the existence of the Mennonite Brethren Church here in Russia. Every time it was answered correctly by the government and by the church: the members of the Mennonite Brethren Church are Mennonites. In spite of this, there seems to have remained a certain obscurity in some circles or possibly only among individual persons. I once was subjected to official investigation here in Halbstadt by the honorable vice governor and by our school board which, surprisingly, was present at the occasion. The official, I might add, seemed to regard this matter as very important. He kept repeating, "Your own people, the Mennonites, *even the teachers*, call the members of the Mennonite Brethren Church, 'Baptists.'" "Whether it is due to *harmless ignorance* or *ignoble insult* I will not judge, but one must still ask with astonishment, "How is that possible?"

It is true that the Mennonite Brethren Church and the Baptists have the same mode of baptism, namely, *biblical immersion*. They also participate one with another in Holy Communion as guests and serve each other with sermons and by officiating in church matters. But is that something foreign in the history of Mennonites? We want to examine the answer for this from church history by beginning with the mode of baptism, which has been raised repeatedly.

The Mennonites have not taken *immersion* from the Baptists, but vice versa. In 1640 the Independent, Richard Blount from England, was sent to the Netherlands. There he was baptized by immersion by Jan Batte, the minister of the Dompelars (Anabaptists – immersionists, also called Collegiants or Rynsburger, who soon joined the Mennonites). Blount returned to London in 1641 and baptized the Independent preacher, Samuel Blacklock. Together they baptized the remaining members of their church, fifty-three in all, thereby establishing the first Baptist Church in England.<sup>130</sup>

129 H.J. Braun, *Friedenstimme*, 5 May 1910, 3-5. Also *Botschafter* 25 May 1910, 4 and 28 May 1910, 3.

130 J.M. Cramp, *Geschichte des Baptismus bis zum Schluss des 18 Jahrhunderts* (Hamburg: Oncken, 1873), 323 – 24; A Rauschenbusch, *Die Entstehung der Kindertaufe – und die Wiedereinführung der biblischen Taufe* (Hamburg: Oncken, 1896), 75; C.A. Ramseyer, *Histoire des baptistes*, Nuechâtel, 1987, 404 – 419.

Besides, immersion is not exclusively the characteristic of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Mennonite tradition. Mennonite churches have practiced it repeatedly. Where did the name *Doompelars*, meaning "dunker," come from in the earliest times of the Mennonites?

It is also true that the Swiss Baptists, in their beginnings, almost exclusively practiced immersion, even in a river. For example, Conrad Grebel at Schaffhausen in the Rhein baptized Wolfgang Schorant called Ulimann, in this way. During Lent in 1525 Schorant called Grebel to St. Gall, where he baptized a "large number" in the Sitter River. "The number of followers rose to more than eight hundred in a few weeks."<sup>131</sup> In fact, immersion was so common among the Anabaptists here that Zwingli, in his persecuting wrath, caused them to be drowned in the river. This possibly was in keeping with the principle: wherewith you have sinned, therewith you shall be punished.

Even today a Mennonite church exists in Emmental, Switzerland, that practices immersion and sprinkling, leaving the choice of mode to the baptismal candidate.

We also find *immersion* in *another place* among the Mennonites. In the Mennonite Church in Hamburg-Altona, Germany, both modes were practiced by two factions within the church from 1648 and on for a hundred years.<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, the Old Flemish practiced *immersion* until the end of the seventeenth century. These were the *most loyal and most stringent followers of Menno* and they were the forebears of our Gnadenfeld, Alexanderwohl and Chortitza churches until the end of the seventeenth century.

In *Pennsylvania*, America, there has existed a Mennonite Church since 1856 called the "United Mennonite Brethren in Christ," which practices baptism by immersion.<sup>133</sup>

In *Glaubenslehre des Cornelis Ris*, recognized and accepted by the Sonnist Mennonite church in Amsterdam and by many oth-

131 Christian Hege, *Kurze Geschichte der Mennoniten* (Frankfurt: Hermann Minjon, 1909), 11.

132 B. C. Roosen, *Geschichte der Mennoniten zu Hamburg und Altona* (Persiehl, 1886).

133 C.H.A. van der Smitten, *Kurzugefasste Geschichte und Glaubenslehre der Alevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten* (Summerfield, IL, 1895), 149.

ers in 1773, we read: <sup>134</sup> "Article XXV, Concerning holy baptism: Concerning holy baptism, we understand that to mean that the whole body is to be *in* or *under* the water. Rom. 6:4; Matt. 3:16; Acts 8:37,38 . . . or an abundant sprinkling with the same," etc.

It is evident that by introducing immersion after its founding in 1860, the Mennonite Brethren Church did not choose anything strange. On the contrary, we find *biblical immersion* present in teaching and practice among Mennonites here and there. For example, take the *Old Flemish* or *Emmenthalern*. No church historian until now has denied them their right to be called Mennonites because of their mode of baptism. Why is this attempted repeatedly in Russia regarding the Mennonite Brethren Church? Is it because of rebaptism? That is impossible, for are we not all descendants of the pre-Reformation and Reformation *Doopsgezinde* (Anabaptists)? Rebaptism was to a certain extent an essential sign of the Mennonites. If some of our Mennonite churches (Gnadenfeld, Halbstadt) presently accept Protestants of other *faiths for membership without rebaptism, then they are deviating from the universal old Mennonitism*. Mennonites rebaptized Mennonites. Thus the Old Flemish and Frisian still did in Russia (Chortitza and Kronsweide) whenever the occasion of a change of membership arose.

No one will want to deny that the Mennonite Brethren Church, by its *requirement of conversion before baptism*, as stated in the Document of Secession and Founding, has become one with Menno Simons! Similarly, the vibrant missionary vision of the Mennonite Brethren Church is a sacred inheritance from "Father Menno." Professor Lehmann says that "Menno has had the greatest influence on and made the greatest contribution to the baptism-minded" (*Taufgesinnte*), keeping them on the quiet evangelical way and guarding them from intermingling with the radical Anabaptists. He also has done more than any other *for the spread* and establishment of "baptism-minded" churches by his teaching, writings and disputations, and by the loving care with which he served them, namely by the many long journeys that he undertook for them. The reason, then, must be some other one.

With this we come to the second point of our investigation: the spiritual fellowship of the Mennonite Brethren Church with the Baptists through preaching and communion, the latter of which they deny Mennonites who have not been baptized by immersion. Let us



look at this more closely.

The worthiest Dutch reformer, Menno Simons, has given the Mennonite churches, which are named after him, the autonomy of the church as a thoroughly solid and biblical principle. As a result, throughout Mennonite history, we encounter deviations in individual churches regarding their beliefs (e.g. foot washing, ordination). These deviations can be explained only by the autonomy of the local church and they are a certain distinctive feature of Mennonitism. The Mennonite Brethren Church, bound together in the Spirit of Christ with believers of all confessions, has always had an open door for those of other faiths who sincerely and decisively urge the new birth, and has willingly had fellowship with them in the proclamation of the Word and in prayer. However, communion is only granted to those persons who, upon the profession of a personal living faith, have been baptized by immersion. They do not, however, slavishly bind the individual conscience, but allow a more liberal understanding among their members. On this basis the Mennonite Brethren Church has fellowship with the Baptists in communion and in other church matters.

Similar distinctive features are also found among other Mennonites. For example, even Johannes Deknatel (teacher of the Anabaptists in Amsterdam, d. 1756) had communion in his own house with Zinzendorf (who practiced infant baptism). Elder H. Unruh and Rev. G. Harder also testified, in my presence on March 20 in the hearing of the vice-governor that their church allowed Baptists to participate in their communion. The Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood in Lichtfeld does the same. Similarly, most of the other Mennonite (*kirchliche*) churches have had fellowship in the proclamation of the Word with churches of other faiths, in that they invite or allow preachers of other faiths to their pulpits. In this way, about twenty years ago, the reformed missionary Irle was appointed to the Mennonite mission field on the island of Sumatra by the Mennonite churches of Russia. No one doubts that he officiated in church matters as expected of him.

Does such an exchange of spiritual fellowship among various faiths alter the distinctive features and the name of any particular church fellowship? Certainly not! *Similarly, the members of the Mennonite Brethren Church cannot be made into Baptists simply by their spiritual fellowship with them. By their birth, upbringing, confession of faith, and religious distinctives as a whole, they belong to the Mennonites. They are and remain Mennonites in spite of friend or foe.* To call the Mennonite Breth-



ren Church Baptists is just as wrong as to label Mennonites collectively as Baptists, as German theologians often do.<sup>135</sup>

It is superfluous for me to remind readers of the well-known fact that the Mennonite Brethren Church had active ecclesiastical and civic interaction with the established (*kirchliche*) Mennonite Church. I would like to emphasize that the Mennonite Brethren Church, with all other Mennonites, believes and confesses:

1. that the Holy Bible is the final authority for faith and for the embodiment of truth;
2. that every kind of revenge is forbidden for the Christian;
3. that one may not swear under any circumstance;
4. that divorce is not allowed;
5. that only adults may receive baptism upon confession of their faith;
6. that the form of church government must be a patriarchal-democratic one (i.e., all spiritual leaders are elected from the church members and all matters of the church are decided at ordered brotherly deliberations by simple majority vote).

The Mennonite Brethren Church distinguishes itself from the Baptists in the following important points of teaching:

1. The Baptists allow divorce and remarriage—the Mennonite Brethren Church by virtue of a deep, genuine Mennonite conviction, can never agree to this.
2. The Baptists permit and perform the oath—the Mennonite Brethren Church considers the oath contrary to the teachings of Christ and uses only the solemn affirmation.
3. The Baptists acknowledge the sword—the Mennonite Brethren Church performs state service without weapons<sup>136</sup> according to their conviction as do also the other Mennonites in Russia.
4. The Baptists do not practice foot washing. The Mennonite Brethren Church considers this a command of Christ. *The Mennonite Brethren Churches are not Baptists, no matter how much many would like to label them as such.*

135 See P. Wurster, *Christliche Glaubens- und Sittenlehre*, (Hilborn: Eigen Salzer, 1906), 62, note 1.

136 The Mennonite Brethren Church is accused of holding to this point of doctrine for practical reasons only. But consider briefly those who have immigrated to America. They could definitely have benefited by amalgamating with the Baptists, who belonged to the largest and most distinguished confessions of faith. In spite of this, the Mennonite Brethren Church in America has had hardly any fellowship with the Baptists, not even in Holy Communion. The question still remains whether by a drastic change of this point of doctrine, the "seventies" (large emigration) would not be repeated.

We do not have to conceal the fact, however, that a noticeable tension exists between the various branches of Mennonites in Russia. We regret its existence but it is there. What is its source? The cause must be sought on both sides; both sides can also do their part to remove the abnormal relationship by mutually, honorably, and unselfishly recognizing each other and allowing for each other's differences. If the Mennonite Brethren Church fifty years ago had the audacity to call the Mennonites (*kirchliche*) "*a spiritually dead church*," then it should also have the honest courage and the sincere love of truth to acknowledge what exists today: *that in the Mennonite Churches (kirchlichen) there also is, praise God, a genuine, vibrant Christianity*, and, that in their mode of sprinkling they have, since antiquity, been at home throughout Christendom. If the Mennonite Brethren Church once could pass judgment, then it should now prove that it could also love and forbear. That is the way to victory! "Jointly we are strong, but working against each other we will fall."

"The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:11).

## How is this Possible?<sup>137</sup>

David Epp (1910)

Motto: The cause must be sought on both sides; both sides can also do their part to remove the abnormal relationship by mutually, honorably and unselfishly recognizing each other and accepting each other's differences. (H. J. Braun, Minister of the Mennonite Brethren Church writing in the *Botschafter* No. 41.)

No one else is urging me to write this. I am doing so on my own from a feeling of personal responsibility, driven by a conviction that I owe a reply to Rev. Braun and our Mennonite churches concerning the above question.

To avoid misinterpretation of the following, I first wish to state that I do not consider the Mennonite Brethren to be Baptists and I do not want to attack the name "Mennonite Brethren Church." The new movement that arose out of the old Mennonite churches of Russia in the early 1860s and that organized itself independently has named itself the Mennonite Brethren Church. The national government has recognized this church, and that settles the matter for me. Since then, however, history recognizes a Mennonite Church, which emigrated here from Prussia, and a Mennonite Brethren Church, which was only formed half a century later in Russia. These are two different matters. I am, however, protesting against the fact—and I think that I am not the only one—that the Mennonite Brethren call us the "church" [*Kirche*] in contrast to themselves.

I am not protesting because I see any slander toward us in this designation, nor because I would not want to be a member of the great invisible Church of Christ on earth made up of all peoples and tongues, nor because I would not want to consider our churches as a small part of that great universal church. On the contrary, I protest because this designation is intended to establish the Mennonite Brethren Church as the antithesis of the Mennonite Church. It suggests that the "church" [*Kirche*] represents that which is unclean and impure, while the Mennonite Brethren Church is considered as the only

137 D. Epp, *Friedensstimme*, 21 July 1910, 4-5; 28 July 1910, 3-5.



bearer of the genuine Christian life. I protest, not because I do not notice the many shortcomings and wrongs of our churches, but because neither our own churches nor the state government has given us the new name. We came here as a Mennonite Brotherhood about 120 years ago and as such we remain today. Meanwhile we have accepted no ecclesiastical accommodations or constitutions that could exclude us from the scope of the brotherhood, nor have we asked for a different name. Hence our name, Mennonite Church, should be left as it was.

I regret even more that our churches and their spiritual leaders already have in part begun to talk about "churchly" Mennonites in contrast to the "Brethren." They have helped thereby to postpone the emergence of a correct view of the matter, and this can only lead to a distortion of the faith. Our old people never spoke of a "Mennonite Church." In fact, they made a sharp distinction between the civic church and the spiritual common body [*Gemeine*], according to Luther's translation. All Mennonites, wherever they are and as long as they might live, establish "brother-churches" or brotherhoods. The Brethren Church should respect this by honorably and unselfishly acknowledging the other church and giving it what is due to it.

Nevertheless, I want to proceed to the actual question: "If it is due to harmless ignorance or ignoble insult I will not judge, but one must still ask with astonishment, 'How is that possible?'" Thus writes Rev. Braun, referring to the fact that many consider the Mennonite Brethren as Baptists and call them thus. Why does it have to be ignoble insult, if it is not harmless ignorance, I would like to ask? What motivates Rev. Braun to give our church a different name than the one it has had for centuries in history?

I really think that the leaders of the Mennonite Brethren Church know the origin of this. If they do not, then I would like to tell them today, frankly and openly, at the risk of being scolded and misjudged for it.

A person can break away from his family without forfeiting his family name. A person can carry on the tradition of the family in part or in totality, without feeling intimately tied to its members and without cultivating fellowship with them. That which really unites the family, which makes it a family, is the inner bond of love and intimate connection. This means more than similar customs and practices, equal sharing of the family property and the same name.

No one will deny that the Mennonite Brethren have come out of the Mennonite brotherhood. But it is no secret that at the founding



of the new church and thereafter, the family bond was severely disrupted, even totally torn apart. The internal union ceased and the external division set in automatically. "The cause must be sought on both sides," writes Rev. Braun, and no one will argue against this. Yet this internal union is lacking even today. Therefore, those who originally were one family and still carry the same family names are strangers to each other. This is sad, but true, and the cause must be sought on both sides.

The fact that the Mennonite Brethren Church withholds, in principle, the Lord's Supper from the Mennonites, while partaking of the same in a brotherly manner with the Baptists, is one reason many consider it to be Baptist. This is why the vice-governor of Tavrida in Halbstadt maintained, "We know that the Rückenau people are not Mennonites but Baptists!"

Moreover, among the disrupting factors is the fact that the Mennonite Brethren Church considers immersion the only, biblically correct mode of baptism, while according to Rev. Braun "the Mennonite churches . . . in their mode of sprinkling have since antiquity been at one with all Christendom." This means that only the Mennonite Brethren Church and the Baptists have the truly biblical baptism, which is the only one that possesses the promise of salvation. The Mennonite churches, on the other hand, have a baptism that has been used in Christendom since antiquity, but that is not the biblical baptism (just as many things remain in the church for centuries, which, nevertheless, are not considered biblical according to our understanding). Therefore all who go over from the Mennonites to the Mennonite Brethren Church must be rebaptized with the correct biblical baptism.

The first Christians did not make the mode of baptism into a statement of faith. Church history sufficiently proves this, and Mennonites believe this today. While they practice baptism by sprinkling, they allow immersion to be considered as the biblical baptism and do not touch it. The Mennonite Brethren Church acts differently.

Reverend Braun considers this as non-Mennonite and seeks to clinch the fact: "Mennonites rebaptized Mennonites!" After all, we are all descendants of the pre-reformation and reformation "Doopsgezinde" (rebaptizers, Anabaptists). Rebaptism was to a certain extent a sign of being a Mennonite.

First, I must mention that "Doopsgezinde" means the same as "baptism-minded" [*Taufgesinnte*]. During the Reformation they had

no interaction with the Anabaptists of the city of Münster nor did they have anything in common. The rebaptism of the Anabaptists totally contradicted the views of the "baptism-minded" on baptism. Menno protested against the behavior of the Anabaptists and Keller puts them in their place historically, namely, totally and decisively outside the fellowship of the "baptism-minded." Therefore the Mennonites are not descendants of the Anabaptists. As far as the matter of rebaptism among the "baptism-minded" was concerned, it referred to those who had unknowingly received baptism as infants. When the Mennonites of old rebaptized, the more enlightened members always considered it abnormal—something to be overcome and set aside.

Yet Rev. Braun continues to narrow the scope of argumentation by maintaining "Mennonites rebaptized Mennonites. Thus the Old Flemish<sup>138</sup> and Frisians still did in Russia (Chortitza and Kronsweide) whenever the occasion of a change of membership arose." Unfortunately, I suspect that proof for this assertion is lacking. I asked Rev. P. M. Friesen of Sevastopol, the best expert on our history and who is doing research for a history of the Mennonites, whether he had any documents that would substantiate Rev. Braun's assertion. "Absolutely none," answered Rev. Friesen, "Therefore I have not mentioned anything about this in my work. But people say that it took place." Dissatisfied with this, I investigated further among old members of the Chortitza and Kronsweide churches. I learned, according to information received from the minister of the Kronsweide Church, Heinrich Pauls who passed away long ago, that in the very beginning of the settlement in Russia more than one hundred years ago, one isolated case did arise. One person, who because of marriage, wanted to transfer membership from Kronsweide to Chortitza, was rebaptized. The immediate circumstances, however, which would help to clarify the matter of this isolated case, have long been forgotten. Yet even this case was perceived to be abnormal and embarrassing and it was not repeated later. As a rule, only a certificate was required for the transfer of membership. Hence it was only one isolated case, not a regular practice in such a transfer. Reverend Braun, however, makes a regular practice out of that isolated case. This is no way of writing history. This is no way of proving something.<sup>139</sup>

138 They should not be called "Old Flemish" but simply "Flemish." D.E.

139 I have a certificate of 1854 in front of me, the text of which is as follows: "To the honorable Elder, Teacher and Minister of the Church at Kronsweide be peace, salvation and blessing from God through Christ our Saviour. Amen."

However, now the conduct of the Mennonite Brethren Church toward the Mennonites is to change. Reverend Braun challenges the Mennonite Brethren Church to prove "that she can also love and forbear." To date the Mennonite Church has borne the Mennonite Brethren Church. One will likely have to interpret this situation in this way: the Mennonite Brethren Church should be allowed to live under the same privileges that the Mennonites, according to their confession, received from the high government authorities. It was not always a loving forbearance; for many it was a forced matter. Nevertheless, this situation has improved considerably of late. If this had not been the case, history would likely have taken a different course. This will, no doubt, be dimly perceived, yet no one wants to admit it to himself or to others. Now that Mennonites as a whole are on the way to fully recognizing the Mennonite Brethren as a sister church, the latter are challenged to love the Mennonite churches and to forbear. The Mennonites, on the other hand, want that which belongs to them to be acknowledged honorably and unselfishly. Only the practice of righteousness can bring about better relations, not the merciful condescension of one side to the other. As long as the Mennonite Brethren Church merely sees itself as forbearing, the inward harmony will never come. Misunderstandings always will occur even among those incapable of malice and who know the history of the Mennonite Brethren Church very well.

Reverend Braun continues in his historical evidence: "If the Mennonite Brethren Church fifty years ago had the audacity to call the *kirchliche* Mennonites a spiritually dead church,"... We deplore the inconsistency of the worthy writer, who charges the Mennonites with ignoble insult for calling the Mennonite Brethren "Baptists" while having the audacity to note the courage of the Mennonite Brethren Church of fifty years ago. The Mennonite Brethren Church not only called the Mennonite churches spiritually dead but also in its first Confession of Faith besmeared them with names that did not come from a heart purified by holiness.

This audacity of the first Mennonite Brethren Church is, however, of very questionable merit. In a new branch of faith just beginning its development, seeking for God and wild fanaticism are still chaotically intermingled. In its stalk and roots runs much diseased Christianity that is not yet cleared away. I repeat that such a church, like the Mennonite Brethren Church in the first decades of its existence, cannot possibly make an unprejudiced and fair judgment. Enough converted men still live today who witnessed that event and



can relate the abnormalities of the first movement. Therefore we regret that Rev. Braun sets forth those excesses as praiseworthy courage, while the Mennonite Brethren Church has tried for decades to distance itself from the abnormal abuses of the early period.

I also wish to point out that the application of Christianity is different for the Mennonites than for the Mennonite Brethren Church. If the latter choose not to acknowledge this, then those who cannot see themselves as Mennonite Brethren will never find grace in their eyes. This is in spite of the fact that Rev. Braun acknowledges "what exists today: that in the Mennonite churches there also is, praise God, a genuine, vibrant Christianity." Surely there were still the remaining seven thousand in the 1860s who had not bowed their knee before Baal, in spite of the "audacious" condemnation by those who seceded.

The following facts prove that the Mennonite Brethren Church remains unwilling to concede what it essentially has acknowledged concerning the Mennonite churches:

1. Although the Mennonite Brethren Church takes part in the General Conference of the spiritual leaders of the Mennonite churches, they totally isolate themselves by their own General Conference.
2. The Mennonite Brethren Church does not recognize the baptism of the Mennonites; the Mennonites accept the Mennonite Brethren into their churches without rebaptism.
3. The Mennonite Brethren Church excludes all Mennonites from the Lord's Supper, even when they consider a certain individual to be converted; Mennonites do not do this.
4. The Mennonite Brethren Church excommunicates members who marry Mennonites; Mennonites do not.
5. In Halbstadt the ministers of the Mennonite Brethren Church preach in regular succession in the pulpit of the Halbstadt Mennonite Church; where does such a thing occur in a Mennonite Brethren Church?

For many decades the slogan has constantly been repeated, "Go out from among them." Subsequently, people have gone out and formed new church fellowships. They have received new ordinances, new rules of conduct for officiating in church matters have been included in the Confession of Faith, and the observances themselves have been changed completely.

Reverend Braun points out those things which, according to beliefs and Confession of Faith, separate the Baptists from the Mennonite Brethren Church. He does this to prove that there is no reason to call them Baptists. The things he mentions are these:



1. the Baptists allow divorce and remarriage;
2. the Baptists permit and swear the oath;
3. the Baptists acknowledge the sword.

I must point out an obvious inconsistency here: divorce, the oath and the sword, these main pillars of distinction of Mennonite teaching do not disturb their heartfelt intimate brotherly fellowship with the Baptists. Yet they refuse Mennonites the same, who only differ in the mode of baptism and not in the belief concerning baptism. Besides, this mode of baptism "has been prevalent throughout Christendom since antiquity," has biblical support, and is corroborated by apostolic practice. Little wonder, then, that people who have not searched into the deepest characteristics of the relations between the Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren Church come to all kinds of conclusions. Even Rev. Braun admits:

It is true that the Mennonite Brethren Church and the Baptists have the same mode of baptism, namely biblical immersion. They also participate one with another in communion as guests and *serve each other with sermons and by officiating in church matters* (my emphasis D.E.). Is that something foreign in the history of Mennonites?

Reverend Braun feels that this is something quite characteristic of the Mennonites and he proves it in the following way:

Elder H. Unruh and Rev. G. Harder also testified in my presence on March 20 in the hearing of the vice-governor, that their church allowed Baptists to participate in their communion. The Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood in Lichtfeld does the same. Similarly, most other Mennonite churches have had fellowship in the proclamation of the Word with churches of other faiths (Rev. Braun, neither out of ignorance nor ill will but merely by mistake, has omitted the word "evangelical." It should have stated: "other evangelical faiths."—D.E.), in that they invite or allow preachers of other (here again the word "evangelical" is omitted—D.E.) faiths to their pulpits. In this way, about twenty years ago, the reformed missionary Irle was appointed to the Mennonite mission field in Sumatra by the Mennonite churches of Russia. No one doubts that he officiated at church matters as expected of him!

My dear Brother Braun! Your zeal has carried you away and caused you to draw on proofs that only hurt your calm, impartial explanation, as I have heard you call it in the periodical (*Botschafter*

nos. 40 and 41). Do you not notice the tremendous difference yourself? The Mennonites allow ministers of other evangelical faiths to preach and members of other evangelical faiths to be guests at the Lord's Supper. The Mennonite Brethren Church and the Baptists, however, serve each other mutually with sermons and by *officiating in church matters* (my emphasis D.E.). Clergymen of other confessions of faith do not officiate in church matters among Mennonites. Therefore, no one confuses us with other branches of faith. On the contrary, the fact that Baptist ministers may officiate in the Mennonite Brethren Church causes the observers to assume that they are Baptist.

The Reformed missionary, Irle, on the Mennonite mission station at Pakanten, Sumatra, twenty years ago undoubtedly did officiate in church matters. However, one would have to add here that we are dealing with the only existing exception. Missionary Dirks, the first and for a long time the only [Russian Mennonite] missionary on the distant island of Sumatra, had to return home for health reasons. A second Mennonite missionary was not ready. We were forced by circumstances, if we did not want to give up our work, to seek help from outside. Such help was found in Brother Irle, who continued the work in the mind and spirit of the Mennonite mission, but only until a second Mennonite arrived.

Reverend Braun slips into the same mistake again, generalizing from one isolated case. He takes an exception required by circumstances and makes a rule out of it.

Another thing must be mentioned here which evidently is unpleasant to the Mennonite Brethren Church. Now as much as ever it strives to make proselytes among the Mennonites. This is completely contrary to the teaching of the Apostle Paul who did not want to build upon another's foundation. This does not occur between the people of Chortitza and Kronsweide, of Gnadenfeld and Lichtenau, of Halbstadt and Ohrloff. They simply are the same Mennonites, though they differ in a few isolated religious practices, such as foot washing.

The old people at Chortitza know that the Baptist minister Oncken from Hamburg organized the Mennonite Brethren Church at Einlage and that he set Elder Unger into his office. We commonly called them Baptists and they voiced no opposition.

Let this suffice. I have not tried to make the Mennonite Brethren Church into Baptists. I only wanted to point out how it was possible that in many places people still speak of Baptists when they refer to the Mennonite Brethren Church. At the same time, I wanted to point

out the only way in which unification can take place (read the motto!).

I readily believe that Rev. Braun and many members of the Mennonite Brethren Church sincerely want to remove the obstacles that for so long have prevented proper understanding between the two groups. However, the historical evidence in no's. 40 and 41, and the anonymous author of *Einige Gedanken* in no. 42 prove that the Mennonite Brethren Church desires rights and concessions for itself, but is unwilling to concede anything.

If the disagreements are to disappear and if those who have the same family name are also to be bound together inwardly as a family, then it is up to our side to overcome a mountain of prejudices. Nevertheless, it is also up to the other side to offer more frankness, trust and tolerance.

I know many dear brothers among the Mennonite Brethren whom I may have offended. However, I would not have come upon this whole matter if I had not been forced to do so by the "historical evidence." It really did not originate from a passion for disputation. The readers and churches may judge the matter themselves.

Above all, the plain truth must be told mutually if there is to be any improvement. Truth is extremely necessary!

*D. Epp*

*Minister of the Chortitza Mennonite Church,  
affiliated with Ekaterinoslav  
Ekaterinoslav, June 1910.*



## Resolution of a Meeting Concerning the Question of the Constitution of the Mennonites of Russia as an Evangelical Mennonite Confession<sup>140</sup> Neuhalbstadt, April 11-12, 1914

1. The following persons were present: Heinrich Unruh (Muntau); P. M. Friesen (Tiege); D. H. Epp (Berdiansk); A. A. Klassen (Neuhalbstadt); Abr. K. Fast (Neuhalbstadt); Joh. J. Klassen (Ekaterinoslav); Wilhelm Dyck (Millerovo); Peter J. Penner (Chortitza); Korn. A. Wiens (Neuhalbstadt); Heinrich Jak. Braun (Neuhalbstadt); Leonhard Sudermann (Berdiansk); David J. Klassen (Neuhalbstadt); Johann H. Willms (Halbstadt); Benj. H. Unruh (Halbstadt); Johann Klassen (Kronsweide); Peter J. Braun (Neuhalbstadt).

2. A. A. Klassen was appointed to chair the meeting.

3. To begin Mr. Peter Penner, Chortitza, gave the following explanation: "The Chortitza Council and—to the extent that the last brotherhood meeting in Chortitza on April 8 of this year expressed itself—the congregation believe that a joint submission to the government with the Brethren congregation in the matter of the confession will not be possible.

The reasons for the above were as follows (according to Mr. Penner): The government prohibits preaching to the adherents of the state religion. For 125 years the Mennonites have honored this law; now the government should not be led to believe that the Mennonites have become unfaithful to these basic principles. The missionary activity of the Mennonite Brethren among those of other faiths has occasioned much dissension, persecution, harassment and even court action and deportations. The Chortitza

<sup>140</sup> Translated from the German text in Russia Related Documents, CMBS, Box 5, Folder 17, no. 1. A copy of the Russian original is in the same location. The document is also published as Appendix 1 in Abe Dueck, "Mennonites and the Russian State," 472–475. The German text without the covering resolutions was published in the *Friedensstimme*, 21 May 1914. The Russian text appeared as an insert in *Der Botschafter*, 13 May 1914 but is not included on the available microfilm copies of the periodical. The Resolutions and the Draft Proposal are printed separately in Unruh, 285–286 and 309–312. The latter is printed together with the constitution of 1917, with the wrong date ascribed to it.



Mennonites do not wish to be identified with the Mennonite Brethren in these respects. If this happens, however, we can hardly expect that our application for recognition as a confession will succeed.

4. After long, intense debates, which revealed that not all those of the old Mennonite group agreed with the opinions expressed all those present agreed to work together. The task was to review the drafts of earlier Commission meetings in order to produce a new draft.

5. The result of the two-day effort was the document, "Constitution of the Evangelical Mennonite Confession in Russia." In fifteen paragraphs this document envisions the establishment and development of the Mennonite congregations, the procedures and regulations to govern the inner and outer affairs of the individual congregations and of the congregations as a whole, the essence and authority of the envisioned organization, the representation of the congregations and their interests in relation to the state and to society, and the membership of the congregations in the "Evangelical Mennonite Confession."

6. This proposed submission to the government will be translated and printed and then sent to all the congregations by the Commission for Church Affairs.

7. An appropriate cover letter will ask the leaders of the congregations to present the submission to their congregations for examination, discussion and decision. The results of these deliberations shall be sent to the Chair of the Commission for Church Affairs<sup>141</sup> so that the responses can be presented at the next General Mennonite convention.<sup>142</sup>

### **Draft Proposal for a Constitution of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession**

1. The Evangelical-Mennonite Confession in Russia (See articles 1104 and 1105, Vol. XI, Part I, Div. III of Code of Laws) shall consist of individual church congregations, each of which has historically developed its own distinctive characteristics and is fully independent with respect to its internal governance, organization and administration of church affairs.

141 D.G. Epp, City of Berdiansk, District of Taurida.

142 In August of this year in Halbstadt.

2. All organized congregations [church parishes] of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall have the rights of a juridical person and bear a church seal.

3. Every congregation shall have the following administrative bodies:

a. A general brotherhood meeting;

b. A church elder [leading minister] who is responsible for the worship services such as preaching, administering the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper), laying on of hands, officiating at marriages, funerals, etc.;

c. Ministers, with the right to preach, officiate at marriages, funerals, etc., and to administer the sacraments and practice the laying on of hands on behalf of the elder and under the special authorization of the congregation or elder;

d. Deacons who help at the worship services and at other church functions and who take care of the poor;

e. A church secretary who is duly appointed by the appropriate authority, namely the church elder, a minister or a congregational member.

4. The church elder or his representative who presides at the same shall convene the brotherhood. All baptized, adult congregational members in good standing are entitled to participate. A simple majority shall decide all issues. All issues concerning the congregation, without exception, shall be subject to the will of the brotherhood. Decisions shall be final on issues that pertain only to the particular congregation; issues that require the consent of the entire Mennonite brotherhood shall be decided conditionally, to serve as a directive for delegates at the synod.

5. The individuals described in 3b, 3c, 3d, and 3e shall be elected for life by the brotherhood and can also be deposed by the same. The church elder or his representative shall install church elders and deacons in their office.

6. The church elder or his representative shall be the representative of his congregation and the leader of its day-to-day activities. Ministers and deacons shall assist him in the leadership and shall constitute the congregational council with him. This body gives direction with respect to congregational issues and regarding the religious-ethical training in the Mennonite educational institutions. In regions where there are several congregations or parishes, a church council may be developed as a common structure for decision-making. It shall consist of the church elders, ministers and deacons of

the respective congregations. The church council shall be responsible for coordinating the activities of individual congregations and supervising religious and ethical education in schools supported by the congregations bound together by the council.

7. The Synod shall be the organ that represents the entire Evangelical-Mennonite Confession and that unites all the congregations. The Synod shall consist of the following persons:

a. The church elders of all the congregations.

b. The ministers, deacons and congregational members who are appointed by the congregations. The Synod shall establish the number of votes that each congregation is entitled to at the Synod according to the membership of the respective congregations. Ministers and deacons who are not elected as delegates to the Synod may be voting participants at the same.

8. The Synod shall meet once a year at a location determined by the previous Synod. The elder or appointed representative of the congregation shall open it where the Synod convenes. After the opening of the Synod the gathered delegates shall elect a chairman, two assistants and six secretaries from the assembly.

9. The chairman of the Committee for Affairs of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall notify the Minister of the Interior in due time concerning the location and time of the opening of the Synod; after the closing of the Synod the chairman of the Synod shall submit a copy of the minutes to the above-named Minister and to the congregations; the original copy, however, shall be submitted to the committee. The decisions of the Synod shall be based on a vote and a simple majority shall be decisive.

10. The Synod, as representative of all Mennonites (of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession) to the government, shall make final decisions on issues concerning the relationships of the entire Confession to the government. These include the keeping of church records; petitions on general matters of the Confession that the congregations have previously dealt with supervision of the religious and ethical life of those drafted for forestry service; and the administration of the welfare and educational institutions supported by the entire Confession according to the statutes of the same.

11. The Synod shall function as a decision-making body to coordinate the activities of the individual congregations, to deal with other issues of a general character, and to handle questions that concern a special group of congregations, in which case the deliberations may take place in subsections.



12. The Synod shall elect a special Commission for Affairs of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession by secret ballot according to a simple majority. It shall consist of four members chosen from the list of delegates. A Mennonite lawyer shall also be elected as legal advisor. He need not be one of the delegates. One member of the Committee shall serve as secretary. This Committee is to be elected for three years. The members of the Committee may be reelected after their term has expired. The chairman of the Synod shall immediately inform the Minister of the Interior concerning the results of the election.

13. The Committee for Affairs of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall be the executive of the Synod. It shall deal with ongoing issues and communicate with the administrative office and individual congregations. The Synod shall give special instructions to the Committee to guide it in its business, decisions and internal administration. The Synod may amend and supplement these, and shall submit them to the Minister of the Interior.

14. Existing congregations may join the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession by a decision of the brotherhood of the respective congregations.

15. The Synod shall accept and register as members of the union of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession congregations that become separated from the original Mennonite communities because of resettlement or for other reasons, but who do not depart significantly from the Confession, on the basis of the congregation's request.



## On the "Mennonite Question" A Response<sup>143</sup>

Heinrich J. Braun

Dear Sir!

I am glad that you are so concerned about the clarification of the great controversy among our Russian Mennonite people. Since the very beginning of the Mennonite Brethren Church some have asked repeatedly whether the members of the Mennonite Brethren Church are actually Mennonites, or whether they would more correctly be called Baptists.

You, sir, hope that an impartial reply to your questions in the respective issue of the *Bürger-Zeitung* would dissipate the fog still hanging in the Mennonite atmosphere. I hope you will not be disappointed, for I will try to be as objective as possible and let history speak. Therefore:

1. "Where and when did the separatists organize the first so-called Mennonite Brethren Church and by whom (nation, denomination) were the first members of the same baptized?"

Your question is very misleading. In the foregoing you speak about "Mennonites" and now you unhesitatingly name the "separatists" as having organized the Mennonite Brethren Church. You surely are aware that the "separatist" churches belong to the Lutheran denomination and not to the Mennonite! Enough of that; we will proceed with the reply.

On January 6, 1860, eighteen Mennonite Brethren signed the "Secession" or "Founding Document" at Elisabethtal, Molotschna, in which they explained that they were seceding from ecclesiastical union with the other Mennonites. In this Founding Document they repeatedly referred to their "Confession" as that of Menno Simons.

The first baptism took place on September 23, 1860. Two Mennonites, Jakob Becker and Heinrich Bartel, baptized each other. Later they baptized others. In his history, P. M. Friesen says that by spring 1861, the practice of baptism was fully implemented.<sup>144</sup>

143 H.J. Braun, "Zur Mennonitenfrage: An den Herrn Interessenten in Nr. 49 der *Bürger-Zeitung*," *Friedensstimme*, May 1914, 2-5.

144 P. M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 285.

In November 1861, the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren in Berdiansk baptized the first Chortitza Mennonite, Gerhard Wieler. Later, others from the Chortitza colony came to the Molotschna Brethren to be baptized.

On March 11 and 18, 1862, the brethren who had been baptized in the Molotschna performed the first baptisms in Einlage. The founding date of the Chortitza-Einlage Mennonite Brethren Church was March 11, 1862.

Thus, baptism by immersion was introduced among the Russian Mennonites without any mediation by Baptists.

2. "What official name did this new church assume and has it been changed over time?"

The first time the name of the newly organized church appears is in its "Voter List for Election of Ministers" which is entitled "Election List of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Molotschna Mennonite Colony . . . May 30, 1860."<sup>145</sup>

In answering the assistant chief of police on May 7, 1862, the first elder of the Einlage Mennonite Brethren Church, A. Unger stated:

Concerning the matter under dispute I, like the other members of our congregation, recognize the Mennonite Confession of Faith as it is set up in the Mennonite Catechism. We draw this teaching from the Word of God and the teachings of our reformer, Menno Simons, who is the founder of the same, and call ourselves Mennonite Brethren.<sup>146</sup>

Gerhard Wieler, deputy of the Einlage Mennonite Brethren Church, in his petition to His Majesty stated that the "awakened persons" were "driven" to "establish an independent Mennonite Brethren Church."<sup>147</sup>

The Confession of Faith published in 1873 and presented to the government is entitled "Confession of Faith and Constitution of the Baptized Believers and United Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia." "Baptized Believers," because the Mennonite Brethren Church, according to the teaching of Scripture and Menno Simons, will baptize only the truly converted believers, according to the Scriptures. "United" because all the Mennonite Brethren Churches in existence at the time (Molotschna, Einlage and Kuban) accepted this confession.

<sup>145</sup> M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 343.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 316-317.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

In the explanation to the Ministry of the Interior on November 25, 1896,<sup>148</sup> Church is called the Mennonite Brethren (in contradistinction to the Baptists).

The new 1900 Confession of Faith of the Mennonite Brethren Church bears the title: "Confession of Faith of the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia." Here one notices an insertion and a change. Why did this come about? The addition "Christian" (I was on the commission elected by the conference for the final revision) appears in the title because many Russian authorities do not know the Mennonites at all. Since the cross is not visible among the Mennonites, Russian authorities repeatedly ask whether they are even a "Christian" fellowship. We inserted "Christian" to clarify this. We also considered the word "evangelical," but simply because this is not included in any Mennonite confession, we eliminated it and chose "Christian" instead. This word also occurs in the common Russian Catechism. We did not use "old evangelical" or "brotherhood," because these terms also denote the total Russian Mennonite brotherhood. Therefore, we chose "Christian" and, from the outset, "Brethren Church" instead of "Brotherhood."

The commission replaced "Baptized Believers" with "Anabaptist" because the former designation seemed too self-assured. Experience had shown that it is possible to err in this area also. The churches recognized the commission's reasoning and accepted the proposed change, since the term "Anabaptist" also occurs in the Rudnerweider and Kronsweider Confession of Faith, the first officially recognized confession of the [Molotschna] Mennonite Brethren Church.

You see, interested sir, this is no "so-called," but a true Mennonite Brethren Church of pure Mennonite stock in spirit and blood.

3. "To what extent did the separatists change the previous confession?" (again, the lapse "separatists").

In answer to this question, I quote the Introduction to the Confession of Faith of the United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church of 1900 . . . (*editor's note: see chapter 17*).

4. "Why does the church in question take Holy Communion with the Baptists and not with the Mennonites?"

The main reason that the Mennonite Brethren churches do not observe Holy Communion with other Mennonite churches lies in their different principles for receiving members into the church. The Mennonite Brethren Church rises and falls with Mark 16:16: "He



that believes and is baptized shall be saved; whoever does not believe, will be condemned."

"Faith must precede baptism. Faith is the beginning of all righteousness acceptable before God and baptism must ensue from this faith as a sign and proof of obedience." "Where there is no new birth, there can never be a true baptism according to the command of Christ, for baptism is the washing of the new birth (Titus 3)."<sup>149</sup>

Another reason that the Mennonite Brethren churches do not practice communion fellowship with the other Mennonite churches is the manner of internal church practice (*Gemeindebau*). Although both agree in their confessions, they differ in practice.

Even several ministers of the Mennonite churches recognize the essence of both these reasons. As a result, they do not observe communion with their own churches.

On both of these questions, the Mennonite Brethren churches agree with the Baptist churches in teaching and practice, which explains their occasional communion fellowship.

Nevertheless, the communion fellowship of Mennonite Brethren churches with members of like-minded churches is only a guest fellowship. The "NB" of Point I in the "remarks" of the Appendix to the first Confession of Faith states: "Generally we may practice fellowship with believers of all confessions to the extent that we recognize them as such, including *church privileges and communion* (emphasis mine).

It must also be emphasized that in most Mennonite Brethren churches the mode of baptism also speaks strongly to this question. Probably only one Mennonite Brethren Church has deviated from this principle to date. The contemporary United Christian Anabaptist Mennonite Brethren Church observes communion only with persons baptized by immersion upon confession of a living faith, but does not bind the conscience of the individual. Thus, in individual exceptional cases persons have approached the Lord's Table with non-immersed but, as far as can be humanly determined, born-again persons. Yes, instances have occurred where such persons have been included as guests at the communion in a church.

I hope to have answered your questions in sufficient detail, to the extent possible in a periodical. For more thorough historical studies I

149 *Die vollständigen Werke Menno Simons* (Elkhart, IN: Mennonitische Verlags-Handlung, 1876), 284, 313.



refer you and all other "interested parties" to the comprehensive volume, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* by P. M. Friesen. It is available in all German bookstores in our Mennonite colonies.

*H. J. Braun,*  
*Minister of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church*  
*Neuhalbstadt, May 1914*

## Confession or Sect?<sup>150</sup>

P. M. Friesen (1914)

In recent weeks this question has aroused the feelings of many people in our Russian Mennonite community. The basis for this concern was mainly the proposal that the Commission for Church Affairs sent to our religious leaders regarding a common constitution for our congregations regarding their relationship to the government. In the draft proposal a general synod and its organ, the Commission for Church Affairs, are given very important responsibilities. The Synod and the Commission are understood to represent the Evangelical Mennonite Confession (confessional community) to the government and act as the leading and mediating body of the entire community.<sup>151</sup> Apparently many congregations viewed the draft as something new, non-Mennonite, and threatening to the age-old autonomy of the individual Mennonite congregation. Such sentiments were expressed verbally and in writing at the March 7 convention in Schönwiese. At the same occasion a counterproposal, which originated in Halbstadt, also was submitted. The authors of this counterproposal tried to express themselves so that all "Mennonite concerns" might be raised.

The convention in Schönwiese decided that a commission in Halbstadt should examine and harmonize both proposals carefully. If necessary, it should draft a new one that would conform to the spirit of the original Mennonite conception of the church.

The commission appointed by the convention met in Halbstadt on April 11 and 12 of this year. It consisted of the following brothers

150 Translated from P. M. Friesen. *Konfession oder Sekte? Der Gemeinsame Konvent in Schönwiese am 7. März und die Kommission in Halbstadt am 11. u. 12. April 1914* (Raduga, 1914).

151 If it appears as though Mennonites are only now becoming concerned about their status as a confession, this is not the case. The leading and competent personalities within our Russian Mennonite community have, with few exceptions I believe, always maintained (as I have) that we are not a sect but a "Protestant confession" in Russia. This conviction is based on the content of our laws pertaining to religious rights, Articles 11-4 and 11-5, T. 1, Vol. XI, of the Code of Laws, 1896 edition. This section of the code of laws actually only deals with "Christians of the Protestant Confession." There was, however, no statute or regulation that defined the relationship of the "Mennonite Confession" to the government and vice versa. This has become recognized as a serious problem for us recently and has been referred to higher administrative officials. The local officials often deal with us as though we are Russian sects, which leads to serious complications, and the proposed legal code seeks to identify us fully with the sectarian groups.

who were members of the Commission for Church Affairs: Minister David Epp, Minister Heinrich Braun, Minister Abraham Klassen (the teacher of religion at the Halbstadt pedagogical school), and engineer Kornelius Abraham Unrau (who was absent). The following additional persons were elected at Schönwiese: Elder Heinrich Unruh; Elder Leonhard Sudermann; Minister Peter Penner (the teacher of religion at the Chortitza pedagogical school); Mr. Kornelius Wiens (teacher of the Halbstadt pedagogical school); Minister Wilhelm Dyck from Millerovo; and Minister P. M. Friesen, then from Tiege. The Commission for Church Affairs, in keeping with its powers, also invited the following brothers as voting participants: Elder Heinrich Günther, Tiege (who was not present due to illness); Elder Johann Klassen, Schönwiese; Minister Johann Klassen, Ekaterinoslav; Licentiate in Theology, Benjamin Unruh, and Licentiate in Theology, Abraham Fast, both from Halbstadt; Mr. Peter Braun, teacher of the Halbstadt pedagogical school; Minister David Klaassen, Neuhalbstadt; and Mr. Johann Willms, Neuhalbstadt. Present as visitors on the first day were Minister Gerhard Harder, Neuhalbstadt; Elder Herman Neufeld, Nikolaievka; Elder Gerhard Regehr, Reinfeld; Minister Jakob Koslowsky, Einlage and Mr. Jakob Federau, Neuhalbstadt.

This commission fulfilled the Schönwiese mandate of March 7 by drafting a "Statute of the Evangelical Mennonite Confession of Russia" in the spirit of the decision of the convention. This was sent to all the congregational leaders for evaluation in the brotherhood meetings. The brotherhood assemblies were expected to respond to the project and present their views to the next General Mennonite Conference.

I believe that the content of the statute has addressed the "Mennonite concerns." I wish to emphasize here that these concerns were strongly expressed both by many representatives of the Mennonite congregations<sup>152</sup> and of the Mennonite Brethren. Perhaps the concerns of some representatives from the former group were expressed

152 Thus, and not as *kirchliche* ["church" Mennonites], the prominent brothers of this largest Mennonite group in Russia wish their churches to be called. I will therefore use this expression in this essay and no longer speak about *kirchliche* the way I have generally done in my history, believing that this was acceptable to both groups. Hereafter I will use the following abbreviations: MG refers to the Mennonite congregations [*Mennonitengemeinden*]. And MBG to the Mennonite Brethren congregations [*Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden*]. Thereby I do not in the least imply that the MG is purer "Mennonite blood" and that it has a better basis to claim the rights as Mennonites than the MBG. [Editor's note: The distinction has been retained as much as possible in this document by rendering *Kirche* as "church" and *Gemeinde* as "congregation," even though the nuances of meaning are difficult to convey.]



more strongly and sharply than those of the latter, both in Schönwiese and in Halbstadt.

Such were the formal and substantive developments of the discussions in Schönwiese and in Halbstadt. Alongside, however, there flowed another stream, which recently has threatened to grow into the well-known Mennonite torrent of discord.

I must reflect on other developments at this point. In 1912, shortly after I completed my *Alt-Evangelischen Mennonitischen Bruderschaft* and when I was able to leave my bed and room again, I had the irresistible urge to see, hear and touch my much-loved Mennonite fellowship, not only on paper but in real life. The great Mennonite patriotism and optimism that had grown during my long historical writing and while living outside the Mennonite world had put rose-colored glasses on my eyes. This was especially true concerning the relationship of the MG to the MBG. I believed that the MGs direction-setting leadership (though not its majority) was tolerant toward the MBG, or at least not hostile toward it, nor judgmental in its assessment of right and wrong in the historical record. I moved for a long time in MG circles and discovered much brotherliness and kindness, and I believed that I had not erred in my historical assessments. I believed that most of the MBG (both the old Rückenau and the newest—the Lichtenau and the Altona-Sagradovka) was more intolerant and more partisan than the leading elders, ministers and brotherhood of the other side. Today I still find that the MBG knows little about tolerance and impartiality, except for a few brothers and sisters and an unknown number of ministers.

After lengthy observations I recognized nevertheless that I had erred badly concerning the mild and non-partisan attitude of my brothers and friends in the larger camp. Besides some very positive assessments of my historical work, I discovered to my great astonishment that several important persons regarded me as a partisan and even hostile opponent of the older church. In addition, friends from both camps brought several other things to my attention. This motivated me to ask, "Is the chasm becoming wider? Is a new hostile agitation against the MB beginning?"

Furthermore, God led me (very much against my own desire) from Moscow back to the south. My sad discoveries were reinforced by my new observations. I began to sense that my stance as a "pan-Mennonite" was being threatened by a catastrophe.

The above-mentioned first proposal for a Mennonite church constitution concerning our status as a confession, besides raising some



doubts about technical matters, also caused me to ask whether this draft provided a guarantee to the minority congregations that the majority congregations intended to walk steadfastly together with them.

Several additional matters arose. A "brother," and a very tolerant one at that, had heard a "Mennonite," who also was very tolerant, say, "They want to throw you out." I saw letters that appeared to substantiate this. My despondent disposition became a very fearful one. Is the old very bitter battle to begin again? I was invited to a meeting regarding this issue, which was to take place in Rückenau (still before the Schönwieser convention). I was grateful that I was too ill to attend. I greatly feared that I might be drawn into the strife that I sensed lay ahead.

The demands that I travel to Schönwiese to represent the MBG became so strong, however, that I felt I had to go. I went with great reluctance and prayed constantly that God would keep me from hostile encounters and especially help me to control my temper, which is my life-long battle. In Schönwiese God answered my prayer.

I have already mentioned the formal resolutions of the meeting above. The character of the meetings was amazingly peaceful, mild, and polite. I looked as far as my increasingly blind eyes could see. I listened. I groped. Against my own will the deep feeling emerged: this is the quiet before the storm; this is the last peace banquet before the declaration of war . . . Mennonites of various persuasions are generally only so nice, so polite, and so friendly toward each other when they feel and fear and wish and fear again. Now it is about to explode! We "brothers"—Minister Peter Unruh, Elder Heinrich Günther, Minister Heinrich Braun and I—joyfully and with thanks to God, shook hands with each other and with a few irenic men from the majority congregations. Among them were several elders. Brothers Unruh and Günther expressed special joy that they had met with the Old Colony brothers (they were referring to the Chortitza and Kronsweide elders and ministers) so cordially. I celebrated with them, but quietly said to myself: Don't be a hypochondriac and don't fantasize!

"God still desires to bless our Mennonite people!" the brothers Günther, Unruh and Braun said. "Yes, thanks be to him," I stated audibly, but in my mind I added, "Don't be a prophet of doom!"

Therefore I only spoke positively about the confessional constitution in my circles, keeping my sad disposition to myself. Naturally I favor a constitution in the spirit of true Mennonitism and have depicted the problems and disadvantages of sect status in the darkest terms. I have also participated in lengthy negotiations in Rückenau

with Minister Heinrich Braun, Minister Jakob Reimer and others, and have pled for the union of the MBG with the MG at the Conference (Synod) and the Commission. (I have dealt publicly as though inwardly I entertained the highest hopes for the success of the confessional issues and for the union of the MBG with the MG). The large Rückenau brotherhood decided on 8 April to "Unite!" Only four brothers opposed this. The second oldest and second largest MBG, the Einlage Old Colony, made the same decision on the second and third day of Easter,<sup>153</sup> on the same day as Molotschna. On this basis, therefore, the issue may already have been decided positively for the entire MBG, even if the votes of all other congregations have not yet been announced.

What aggravated my sad disposition in Schönwiese were anxious reports from friends about irritation in Chortitza (and in the Molotschna) district about "all the new congregations that have been organized." This sounded very strange, as though it was an entirely new issue, as yet unclarified and not yet regulated. Also—conversations at railroad stations and on wagons are of course not minuted, although they often are taken to heart nonetheless—I witnessed conversations between more who were hostile to the issue than who favored it. Special concern was raised about the great danger that the "propagandistic spirit" of the MBG posed for the MG.

About a week after the Schönwiese convention, an article in no. 32 of the *Bürger-Zeitung* was brought to my attention. It was entitled, "The Privilegium of the Mennonites is being carried to the grave," and it was signed, "A Mennonite."

The same opinions regarding the grave danger that the "propagandistic" MBG posed for the MG formed the substance of this theologically, historically and legally unsubstantiated article. In an even more crassly unhistorical manner the author suggested that the MBG as a Mennonite body existed because of the quiet acquiescence of the Mennonite leadership. This article strongly urged the MGs to "shake off" the MBG (both the old and the newest, Evangelical *Allianz*). The resulting inevitable danger for the MBG of becoming subject to military service would make the MBG disappear like a soap bubble.

<sup>153</sup> On the same day that the large brotherhood assembly took place in Chortitza. See below.

In No. 28 of the *Botschafter* we read:

Chortitza, 8 April<sup>154</sup>

A well-attended brotherhood meeting of the Chortitza and Kronsweide congregation took place today . . . Finally the issue of "Confession or Sect" was opened for discussion, not to vote on the same but only to become familiar with it. Some of those present pointed out that it might be necessary to clarify the relationship of the Brethren Church, etc., to the old Mennonite churches, before a confession could be considered, since it was to encompass all groups in the Mennonite community. After a prolonged and many-sided deliberation the question was tabled for a later occasion.<sup>155</sup>

This article in the *Botschafter* No. 28 only came into my possession after the Halbstadt sessions. If I had read it on the morning of 11 April, what happened to me would probably not have happened.

At the opening of the first session on 11 April, brother Peter Penner, Chortitza, made the following pronouncement:

The Chortitza Council and—to the extent that the last brotherhood meeting in Chortitza on 8 April expressed itself—the congregation also believe that there is no hope for approaching the government on the issue of the confession with the Brethren Church.

This position was justified as follows (also by Mr. Penner):

The government prohibits preaching among adherents of the state religion. The Mennonites have respected this law for 125 years; now they should not give the government the impression that they have become unfaithful to its basic laws. The mission activity of the MBG among people of other faiths has occasioned much disagreement, persecution, oppression, even legal proceedings and expulsions.<sup>156</sup> Chortitza Mennonites do not wish to be identified with the Mennonite Brethren in this respect by the government. If this happens then we cannot expect success regarding the request for recognition as a confession.

154 Therefore, on the same day on which the MBG at brotherhood assemblies in Rückenau and Einlage decided to "Unite!"

155 In the *Botschafter*, No. 31, we read: "Corrections: The report concerning the decision of the brotherhood meeting in Chortitza gives the impression that the Kronsweide church had also already deliberated on the question of 'Confession or Sect,' but that is not the case. We will only discuss that question when the last draft, which was reworked during the Easter week, is before us. Elder of the Kronsweide Church. J. Klassen."

156 That has not happened. Brother Johann Wieler, who will be referred to below, went abroad at his own initiative, in order to escape from the threat of danger.



I do not know how this explanation fits with the notice in the *Botschafter* about the brotherhood meeting in Chortitza on 8 April. Brother Penner supplemented his pronouncement with a long statement concerning what he considered clear evidence that the MBG had violated laws regarding propaganda that their fathers had accepted. They had brought the Mennonite brotherhood into disfavor with the government and had brought it into serious danger. This was entirely in keeping with the depiction in the aforementioned article in the *Bürger-Zeitung* regarding the propaganda of the MBG and the Evangelical Mennonite Church.

Colleague Penner and the other Old Colony brothers nevertheless assured us that they knew nothing about the source of the article, which assurance I fully accept. Brother Penner's declaration, according to my perception, had an explosive impact. The other Old Colony leading brethren remained silent. It seemed to me that they were uncomfortably taken by surprise. I may be wrong. Elder Unruh, Elder Sudermann, secondary school teacher Cornelius Wiens, secondary school teacher Abraham Klassen, Johann Willms, and Minister Gerhard Harder protested mildly or sharply against adjournment, as Mr. Penner's pronouncement logically implied. Minister Braun, Minister David Klaassen and I made lengthy statements opposing Penner. Licentiate Unruh (also a "brother") mediated with very lively, although very sincere, intervening comments. Minister William Dyck constantly sought to intervene by calming and seeking to pacify the situation. Elders Unruh and Sudermann also did the same, as did Elder Herman Neufeld during his brief presence.

Brother Penner's pronouncement, the counter-pronouncements and the opposing and conciliating statements took up the entire lengthy first session and the second session. The same subject also came up for discussion at the morning session of the second day.

Despite the extra lively debates, it was decided at the conclusion of the afternoon session of 11 April to proceed together to fulfill the mandate of the Schönwiese convention, even though the "brothers" David Klaassen, Heinrich Braun and I had already decided to leave the sessions and withdraw from this hopeless task. This might have been the most consequential and profitable course of action.

In any case, the representatives worked at the statute in a thorough, cordial, and almost jovial manner during several long sessions, with only one uncomfortable recess. The result of the protest and the explanatory statements of Heinrich Braun, David Klaassen and I, the intervening conciliatory statements of Licentiate Unruh, and the ex-



traordinarily non-partisan statements of secondary school teacher Wiens, Minister Abraham Klassen and Mr. Willms was as follows. Colleague Penner asserted that the investigations of the vice governor of Tavrida on 19 to 22 March 1910 regarding the firm Raduga and the supposed general propaganda efforts in Halbstadt, which were reported in a rather biased article in the *Botschafter* entitled, "Fear in Halbstadt,"<sup>157</sup> served as evidence of illegal propaganda. Brother H. Braun refuted these assertions, stating:

An investigation has taken place, but it has not shown evidence of illegal propaganda. To the contrary, the vice governor, while putting his hand on the report, told me when he questioned me for the third time (the night of 21-22 March, around 3:00 a.m.) as the last one whom he questioned, "I wish to speak a few words openly to you now. I cannot tell you how the Lord Governor will judge the issue, but I am sitting before you with the full authority of the Lord Governor. I could take the strongest measures available only to a governor if I had discovered any wrongdoing. But I see that I may leave everything as it was, without taking even the mildest measures." And a second time: "I could . . . (as above), I could arrest, I could have your business closed now at night, etc., if . . . (as above), but I perceive that I can leave everything as it was without taking the mildest measures."

Then Elder Heinrich Unruh responded (at the first morning session of April 11): "Yes, but the Lord Vice governor stated to me with raised finger, 'Warn your ministers and the Rückenau people and tell them not to wage propaganda.'"

Minister Heinrich Braun again pointed out that Elder Unruh and he were the last ones questioned regarding the issue during the night of March 20 to 21. He had therefore heard the outcome of the investigation. Minister Braun's testimony was confirmed by two of those present. They reported that the Governor of Tavrida had visited Halbstadt about four months after the investigation (in July) and had spoken to various representatives of the district about the issue. Minister H. Braun asked him at that time whether he had discovered any wrongdoing. He responded, "If something had been discovered, I would already have known what action to take." It should also be noted that among all the Russian religious publications that Raduga distributed then and still distributes, and that are examined for possi-

157 "This article has opened our eyes," Mr. Penner stated.

ble censure, not a single charge has been laid.

Reference was also made in the debates to the activity of Johann Wieler, who died in Romania. In the service of the well-known chief officer of the guards, W. Paschkov, he carried on a vibrant mission among the Orthodox for about three years. It was pointed out that at the annual session of the MBG in Friedensfeld (now Miropol) in May 1883, when Br. Wieler sought the session's support and blessing for an effort with the Paschkovites, he provoked the Conference's strong opposition. Many strongly urged him to desist from his intentions. The decision of the Conference was, in essence, that the whole responsibility was placed on Wieler. Many "Mennonite Brethren" nevertheless gave Br. Wieler their sympathy and supported him with their financial gifts, and "Mennonites" have done the same. A Mennonite congregational elder has supported him repeatedly with substantial financial gifts. I will not identify him by name. The MBG first supported Wieler in this capacity when he worked among Russian Molokans and Old Believers in Romania.

In 1869, in the district of Kherson, Elder Abraham Unger of Einlage baptized a Russian who, without having been examined or accepted, stepped into the water in front of Unger in a line of German baptismal candidates. In the early 1860s, the Molotschna and Einlage MBG baptized three or four Orthodox individuals. The police and the courts have investigated and punished or dismissed everything that has been presented above or that follows below pertaining to the question of regarding "propaganda." Furthermore, the representatives of the MBG confirmed that presently there are three "Mennonite Brethren" who were formally serving legally registered Russian "evangelical" congregations (or at least recently served them) with formal authorization by the authorities. They are minister Jakob Wiens in Samara, a brother Rempel in Kherson, and minister Adolf Reimer as theological instructor at the Petersburg Russian Evangelical Theological Seminary (authorized by the Minister of the Interior). For my part, I reported concerning my relationships to the evangelical Russians, which was fully known by the district and central authorities. I can produce written responses from the latter as evidence of my open correspondence about these issues with them. Hereby I wanted to emphasize that we are not concealing anything concerning our "propaganda" (see below ideological propaganda).

Brother Braun also testified that many "Mennonite Brethren" provide financial support to authorized Russian evangelical ministers. Other "Mennonites" also do the same, although in much smaller



percentages. The other side pointed out and our side gladly acknowledged that Mennonite Brethren, in private conversations with those of other religions including the Orthodox, often speak about that which their heart is full of (and that is their greatest comfort in life and in death—this is my own addition). Many brothers also preach in legally authorized Russian evangelical church services when asked to do so. Some (very few) “Mennonites” also do the same, although very seldom. All this, which both sides confirmed as accurate, Br. Penner and others in the session (and, according to reports, many in wider circles of the MG) regarded as evidence of the forbidden, punishable propaganda that was very harmful for the entire Mennonite brotherhood. Likewise, they viewed it as a breach of the promise given by the immigrant fathers by which they had received the *Privilegium* (Where is the document that contains this promise? In all my historical research I have not found it). Others and I also stated that with the immigration to Russia our fathers had naturally submitted themselves to the Russian law, under which we also stand today. We are all subject to the penalty of the law if we violate it, so also with specific reference to propaganda. Hereby it has become necessary to distinguish between criminal and ideological propaganda (“to testify as a witness”). Criminal propaganda is defined by the law and is punishable by the judge. The wise and righteous judges must determine the point at which ideological propaganda becomes criminal propaganda. The police are at his service for that purpose and, above all, so is the careful, watchful eye of the Orthodox Church, which the Russian State regards and protects as the real and only true church. Our fathers knew this and we also know it well. Whether there was a formal promise or not makes no difference to us. One can state, for example, that illegal acceptance into our congregation, trying to influence by means of threats, deception, slandering the congregation or an individual, and other like actions, constitute criminal “propaganda” according to the law. But to be silent about that of which the heart is full—who can do that? Many “Mennonite Brethren” and more than a few “Mennonites” cannot keep from sharing their faith in some way, in keeping with the word and command of Christ: “You shall be my witnesses,” and “Preach. . . !”

I maintained that the psyche of the MBG was “propagandistic” in that sense and stated that if the MBG promised the MG to wage less propaganda than it wages today (I mean “ideological” propaganda, “confessing as witnesses to our hope of salvation”), then I will leave the MBG! (I apologize for my undiplomatic language; I will need to

make additional apologies below).

We, the "brothers" in the Commission, regard "propaganda," as it relates to many "Mennonite Brethren" and to every true believing Mennonite in Russia, in the sense defined by the document, "The Position of Mennonites on the Question of Religious Freedom and Propaganda." This was drafted by the Molotschna Mennonite Church Council on 7 February 1908,<sup>158</sup> accepted by the General Council in Schönwiese in the same year, reexamined in Ekaterinoslav by a commission appointed by the Council, and accepted by the General Conference of Mennonites in Schönsee in 1910.<sup>159</sup> This "Position of Mennonites" and the "Explanatory Supplement to the Document: The Position of Mennonites on the Question of Freedom of Religion and Propaganda" (drafted by the deceased Elder Abraham Görz and by me after we were commissioned by the Molotschna Mennonite Council, and which was also accepted by the conventions in Schönwiese, Ekaterinoslav, and Schönsee in 1910 and at Nikolaipol in 1912) was presented to the Department of Religious Affairs on 8 March 1910 by the deputies for all Mennonites (Abraham Görz, Heinrich Braun, David Epp). The representative of the Duma, H. A. Bergmann, had already submitted the "Position of Mennonites" in 1908.<sup>160</sup>

Based on all this, especially the explanation and the accusations of Br. Penner, I asserted that it would create serious hardship for the MG, which would probably side with Chortitza. The MBG would be disgraced if the latter continued to work with the former in church affairs as it has since the 1910 convention in Schönsee.

Clearly the MBG is an abomination to a large segment, probably the largest segment, of the MG. Just as shown by Br. Penner's Chortitza pronouncement, so it is also shown by the form of the invitation to last year's convention in Rudnerweide. The invitation stated that the entire first day of the convention was a closed session on issues concerning the MG (where obviously the "Mennonite brethren" may not attend; they also have their own very closed "annual session" or General Conference). Thus far the majority congregations were fully within their proper rights and remained completely parliamentary. But the invitation continued: "and perhaps also half of the second day." Imagine a delegate, who may have come a hundred, a thousand, or several thousand kilometers [*verst*] and does not know where

158 See *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 630-631, 635.

159 Also by the convention in Nikolaipol in the year 1912.

160 See *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 631ff.



to stay or how to conduct himself during the session on the morning of the second day! This would have been proper for the earlier "General" Conference of the MG (to which by chance "brethren" were occasionally and privately invited). Since the Schönsee "General Mennonite" Conference, however, the situation is quite different.<sup>161</sup> The MBG now is present with the same rights, presenting its church resolutions by authorized delegates, having its congregational recommendations accepted by the conference committee, having these submitted to the ministry and authorized by the same for the deliberations of issues of general concern. The majority congregations gladly conceded the right to convene closed sessions (cf. Schönsee convention).

But this necessitates that the dates and precise times be determined! (I must point out that a special closed session is to be arranged for the "brethren" at the upcoming conference in Halbstadt. A trustworthy leading brother of the MG also later assured me that the form of the invitation to Rudnerweide was an administrative oversight and not a deliberate act of contempt. I gladly accept this).

At this point in the session I unfortunately was so upset that I became impolite and offensive, especially toward one brother who was a delegate of the MG. In the subsequent session I felt obliged to request forgiveness because of my offense.

I have already stated that Br. Penner's pronouncement made an explosive impact. I had feared and expected such a turn of events, but not at this point and not from this source in such a harsh form. I expected something of that nature at the forthcoming General Conference or at a prior convention at Schönwiese (I was inwardly prepared for that). The most painful aspect for me was that Br. Peter Penner made the pronouncement and the manner in which he made it. I am led to quote some correspondence related to the Schönsee convention of 1910 from my book:

We in the Old Colony are somewhat slow, so we are not excited too quickly. Here, too, people have read with interest in the periodicals about the outbursts on both sides, but have reduced them to the proper measure of personal irritability, and therewith prevented too strong a generalization. . . We . . . men of the Old Colony . . . would have, I believe (if it had come to that), tried to subdue it. We did not seriously believe

<sup>161</sup> I strongly request that interested persons read my perspective of the significance of the Schönsee convention in my book, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, pages 645ff.

in this danger, since we believed that we had matters in hand, i.e., to be able to ward off any offence.<sup>162</sup>

I responded to the author of the letter approximately as follows:

I am very concerned about you Old Colony people. You hard Flemish and Frisians move very thoughtfully and slowly toward a new point of view. Once you have accepted it, however, you stick to it very resolutely. Eventually I hope to see calm, moderate, careful alliance Christians (I use that terminology because it has already been used) of a new formation in you (I refer to an alliance of the soul, which manifests itself in friendship and patience toward brothers who think differently). This alliance of the heart is dearer to me than an alliance at the Lord's Supper, which sometimes develops into orthodoxy.

Here I was again referring to the leading elders, ministers and brotherhood, as I have indicated above and not to the numerical majority. I was perturbed every time my friends from both congregational groups casually dismissed my aspirations, because their attitude threatened my view through rosy glasses. Now the catastrophic destruction of my identity as a "pan-Mennonite" was inflicted by a source from which I had such high expectations, although my impressions at Schönwiese had already been very sad. (I wish to acknowledge that I received those sad impressions at the convention to a lesser extent from Old Colony representatives than from the other side).

On the morning of 11 April my saddened disposition became an interminable, deep pain that still torments my soul and from which it probably will never recover. My Mennonite heaven, my Mennonite ideal, a part of my Christian and historical ideal, has been destroyed.<sup>163</sup>

I have only experienced such a frightful pain of the soul, occasioned by circumstances outside myself, a few times in my life. The previous time it occurred during the well-known night in Sevastopol in prison, where I celebrated the Lord's Supper with our beloved—my beloved—Mennonite criminal. This time I experienced such pain of soul and it was directly caused by my dear friend Peter Penner. (Hereby I wish partially to excuse my very unbecoming anger).

But again I return to the issue as a whole. During the sessions I stated that I would devote all my energies to separate the two congregational groups since I now regarded them as intrinsically incompat-

<sup>162</sup> *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 650.

<sup>163</sup> See concluding chapter of my *Mennonite Brotherhood*, pp. 975ff.

ible and irreconcilable. The congregations of the Chortitz district will assuredly raise the pronouncement of 11 April to the level of a firm resolution.<sup>164</sup> All Chortitz's daughter settlements, as far as deep into Siberia, will probably side with it. Together these constitute three-eighths of the (minimum of 80,000) Russian Mennonites. Might they not win another two- or three-eighths of the Molotschna MG (even if under strong protest of strong minorities)? That would then add up to three-quarters. The MBG, however, constitutes only between one-fifth and one-quarter!

Many in both camps are asking, "What will come of this?" I believe that both congregational groups are sufficiently large and in every respect strong enough to exist independently in every purely ecclesiastical regard.<sup>165</sup> In the village, in the *vollost*, in the forestry issue, in school and welfare matters and in all kinds of other cultural pursuits they cooperated before 1910 (before the General Conference in Schönsee), and they will continue to do so. The purely spiritual fellowship of many brothers and sisters from the MBG with many brothers and sisters of the MG in the Word and in prayer (and in the Lord's Supper for many) will continue as before. I believe it will be practiced much more extensively, irrespective of the oppressive majority that will probably further sharpen the formal separation. We also, no doubt, have many brothers in the Lord among those who would like to distance themselves from us as sharply as possible. Johannes Claassen, a West Prussian Mennonite who passed away a few years ago and once taught at St. Chrischona and Johanneum, once stated: "There have been times when a child of God was put to the rack and another child of God was responsible for inflicting the torture, in order to save the soul of the former" (quotation from memory). Our Mennonite friends and opponents are certainly far from wishing to torture us! We will unite with them (those who are children of God on both sides) in the end when we will see Jesus "as he is" and we also will acknowledge each other.

"Well," a dear leading brother and friend from the majority congregations said to a leading "brother" a few days after the meeting of

164 After long debates Br. Penner exclaimed, with strong emphasis, that the issue "shall not disappear into the sand."

165 The draft laws refer to a "religious society" as something between a sect and a confession. A minimum of twelve legally authorized sect churches may form such a society; it is authorized by the Minister of the Interior, who is also the only one who may dissolve it. Each individual congregation is fully subject to the governor. The society has special advantages for the church. A Confession can only be created or dissolved by an act of law.



the commission in Halbstadt, "What will happen if we should all withdraw from you? You will be made into Baptists" (that is, your Mennonite privileges will be revoked). That is what the Mennonite opposition tried to do in 1860-1864, but the government offered the land in the Kuban to "the Mennonite (sic!!) Heinrich Hübert in Liebenau and his associates." This land now forms the Mennonite district of Velikokniasesk (document of the Minister of Crown Lands of 4 March 1864). The government then drafted a document in the name of the authorized representative of the "Mennonites" who settled in the Kuban—the "Mennonite" Johann Claassen. This document extended the same religious privileges to them that the Mennonites in New Russia enjoy (Document of the Caucasian Administrative Office of 30 May, 1866).<sup>166</sup> That is what was attempted in 1879-1880. The government (Department of Religious Affairs of the Minister of the Interior) presented the document of 6 March 1880 to the brethren. The document stated that their religious differences with the other Mennonites were without significance and that it would be unthinkable to take the Mennonite Brethren, against their own will, from one tolerated confession (the Mennonite) into another one (the Baptist). That was attempted in 1895-96. The government repeated its explanation of 1880 (Document of the Ekaterinoslav District Police Office of 28 Dec., 1896, Number 4349).<sup>167</sup>

So by divine providence the MBG stands, with all other Mennonites, under the High Imperial Russian government and jurisdiction for protection and prosecution. The individual Mennonite congregations of all factions need each other for their common profitable spiritual task, despite much erring and misunderstanding on both sides, "until we all arrive at a common confession of the Son of God."

I obviously will retract my statement about "wishing to put asunder," which I spoke in anger. No one who has read my *Ein Mennonitischer Schächer*<sup>168</sup> ("A Mennonite Criminal") and my *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft* believes that I really want the two groups to move further apart again, i.e., regress. "Separate" only if the declaration of the Chortitza Council of 11 April and its basis becomes the established principle for the MG. According to my deepest conviction this declaration is tantamount to spiritual death.

<sup>166</sup> See *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 414-415.

<sup>167</sup> See *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 479-481, 527.

<sup>168</sup> P. M. Friesen, *Ein Mennonitischer Schächer* 2nd ed. (Hepburn, SK: John H. Kroeker, n.d.).

It is this impression that has created (and still creates) such deep inner pain for me.

I favor uniting—God knows—also in formal ecclesiastical matters, but only if the MG and the MBG mutually clarify matters, learn to understand each other thoroughly on basic issues, and trust and love each other unconditionally and agree to bear each other's burdens. For this to happen, however, it is necessary that both groups establish precise procedures for dismissal from one congregation and admission to another regarding mixed marriages. In this respect the MBG has not always dealt in forthcoming manner. It has not acted as a sister church to the extent that it could have and should have, without violating its principles. Regarding the question of rebaptism, which is so very painful for me<sup>169</sup> (I am speaking as a church historian), it seems that, based on fifty-five years of experience, no change can be expected.

Actually, the MG performed rebaptisms in earlier years after 1860, and not so seldom. The last known documented rebaptism of a person who had received baptism by immersion by the MBG occurred in a MG in the year 1899. It was not in some unlearned, small, remote congregation (I emphasize this very specifically because for many years the majority congregations proclaimed both verbally and in writing, "We do not rebaptize any Mennonite Brethren who have received baptism by immersion.")

If such a mutual understanding and union should still occur before I die, I would sing a very joyous "Hosanna." Otherwise we will proceed like Abraham and Lot, Paul and Barnabas, Paul and Peter, and allow God to direct the history of his church according to his wisdom and grace!

What if hardship should befall the MBG? "All who wish to live holy lives in Christ Jesus must experience suffering."

Concluding comment: This submission is entirely my own affair. I take full responsibility for the publication of this statement, which I do in part against the advice of many friends from both camps.

*May 1914.  
P.M. Friesen  
Tiege*

<sup>169</sup> See *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 307, 1006 note 108.

## Explanation<sup>170</sup>

Heinrich Braun (1916)

The Mennonites are a Protestant confession. As is known, Protestantism proclaimed the principle of personal freedom in religious matters, against the medieval principle of authority that prevailed in the hierarchical church of the West. This individualism and subjectivism was not applied uniformly everywhere among the Protestants.

The Mennonites, among others, also became radical adherents and advocates of the Protestant idea. The purely Protestant character was expressed in the realm of teaching and polity. As for teaching, the Mennonites do not have any symbol or confession of faith that would represent an unequivocal authority for them. They regard the Holy Scriptures as the only guide to faith. The polity of the church is patriarchal-democratic; that is, all spiritual ministers are elected from the church and a simple majority at church assemblies decides all church issues.

The whole Mennonite brotherhood consists of many congregations, which are autonomous and independent of each other. This independence or self-governance of the congregation flows from the fundamental principles of Mennonitism, which the reformer Menno Simons established, and that are irreconcilable with a centralized government based on church absolutism. Obviously this principle of congregational autonomy encouraged congregational individualism, especially in polity and organization.

Thus, already during Menno's life, his followers in the Netherlands became divided into several churches. It must be noted, how-

170 Translated from A. H. Unruh, *Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde*, 301-308. The document was previously published as Appendix 2 in Abe Dueck, "Mennonites and the Russian State," 476-482. Copies of two original Russian versions are in CMBS, Russia Related Documents, Box 5, Folder 17. One has a handwritten note at the end with an October 1915 date; the other has an additional paragraph at the beginning and is annotated with the date of February 1916. The first paragraph of the expanded version states approximately as follows:

The Mennonites belong to an old evangelical confession. Today they represent a certain part of the evangelical/protestant church, but are distinct in terms of

- (1) baptism of adults (Mark 16:16);
- (2) refusal to swear the military oath; and
- (3) not participating in military violence (Matthew 5:33-45).

The German translation in A. H. Unruh, 301-8, is the short version, but Unruh has indicated the date as October 1916.



ever, that the various Mennonite factions did not stem from theological disagreements but, almost without exception, from practical concerns. They quarreled about how to apply religious principles in life.

In this way various groups originated among the Mennonites. These groups again sometimes united into several churches that maintained various distinctive characteristics. The most significant groups among these were the Flemish and the Frisians, or the strict ones (*Strengen*) and the moderates (*Gemässigten*).

There are essential Mennonite dogmas, however, which all the various Mennonite groups follow. They include:

1. The Holy Scriptures are the sole guide to faith and the sum of all truth.
2. Only adults may receive holy baptism based on their confession of faith.
3. Vengeance is forbidden to Christians.
4. Christians may not swear.
5. Divorce is not permitted.
6. Church polity is patriarchal-democratic.

Whatever differences have prevailed among Mennonites, these principles nevertheless are characteristic and essential for every confessional group and every congregation. These principles also distinguish Mennonites from other Protestant groups which, like the Mennonites, may practice adult baptism, but differ on various other significant theological issues, such as divorce, swearing of oaths and military service.

The following are the main groups among the Mennonites of Russia:

1. The so-called "old" Mennonite congregations;
2. The Mennonite Brethren congregations.

All the Mennonites originated at the same time. They have been called "Mennonites" since the time of Menno (1492-1559).<sup>171</sup> To distinguish one group from the other, the name "old" refers only to their organization and has no historical significance. Nevertheless the division of Mennonites into various confessions cannot be disregarded simply because the grounds for separation among them were mostly the application of church discipline rather than theological issues. It would be more accurate to speak only of groups that belong to the "strict" party and others that belong to the "moderate" party.

<sup>171</sup> Editor's note: Braun gives incorrect dates for Menno's birth and death. The correct dates are 1496-1561.

The first Mennonite Brethren congregation was established in 1860. The circumstance leading to the founding of a new church was that some Mennonites believed that the practices of their congregations did not agree with the Holy Scriptures. Therefore they decided to begin an independent Mennonite church. According to their convictions, it would be established in the spirit of true disciplined followers of the gospel and of their first teacher Menno Simons. (See the submission to the highest authority by Johann Klassen, a founder of the Mennonite Brethren Church from the village of Liebenau, submitted on May 21, 1862).

The authorities mentioned this church in the following dispositions:

1. In the order of the Minister for Agricultural Lands on March 4, 1864, according to No. 5534, issued in the name of the first elder of the Brethren church of the Molotschna Mennonite district, "the Mennonite from the Tavrida, Berdiansk volosts, the village of Liebenau-Heinrich Huebert" (later elder of the Kuban Mennonite Brethren Church), concerning permission for the Mennonite Brethren to settle in the Kuban *volost*:

2. In the instructions of the representative of His Highness in the Caucasian *volost*:

- a. By the military staff headquarters of the District of Kuban on October 3, 1863 according to No. 2746, in the name of the deputy of the Mennonite Brotherhood of the Ekaterinoslav and Tavrida *volosts*, a Mennonite from the village of Liebenau-Johann Klassen, regarding distribution of land for settlement, and

- b. By the state administration on May 30, 1866 according to No. 2718, in the name of the Mennonite Brethren of Tavrida and Ekaterinoslav in the village near the railroad station Nevinomskii (the earlier villages of Velikokniashesk and Alexandrodar in the District of Kuban) regarding the confirmation of rights as members of the Mennonite confession of faith for the new settlers, and

- c. In the explanations of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Division of Church Affairs:

- (1) on March 6, 1880, according to No. 936, and

- (2) on November 25, 1896, according to No. 4731 in the name of the Governor of the District of Ekaterinoslav regarding confirmation of the Mennonite Confession of Faith: "Those baptized on the faith of the United Mennonite Brethren Church," regarding matters relating to the Einlage church.

The main reason for the founding of this new church was the question of the church ban. This question has always been a major issue for the Mennonites, which they have not uniformly resolved. It already led to a division during Menno's life—in 1555—between the “moderates” or “coarse ones” (Frisians) and the “strict ones” or “determined ones” (Flemish). The “moderates” were less severe regarding church discipline, whereas the “strict ones,” to whom the reformer and his closest associates Dirk Philips and L. Bouwens belonged, were harsher in church discipline.

In their relationship to each other, neither group exemplified special brotherly love. According to Hartknoch's history, in 1778 the Flemish and Frisians were already being rebaptized when individuals from either group transferred to the other group.<sup>172</sup> On this basis it is evident how important the question of the church ban was for the Mennonites. Serious differences of opinion arose not only among the Mennonites in the Netherlands but also in other countries (e.g., in Moravia)<sup>173</sup> and also in Russia. Already in 1815<sup>174</sup>, before the origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church, a Mennonite church was formed—the so-called *Kleinegemeinde*—which insisted on the stringent application of church discipline, just as the Mennonite Brethren Church did forty-five years ago.

The Mennonite Brethren Church, however, does not differ from the other Mennonite churches in Russia in any principal matters of Mennonite theology, as noted in the explanatory preface to the authorized Confession of Faith of the Mennonite Brethren (1902 edition, p. 5), where it states:

As always the Mennonite Brethren Church emphasized what is repeated here: our new organization of 1860 did not destroy the Confession of Faith of the general Mennonite churches in Russia, which recognized the baptism of adults. Instead, the Mennonite Brethren Church began with protest against weak church discipline. This protest remains to the present, despite the hearty fellowship that the Brethren Church nurtures with other Mennonite churches.

In some respects, however, the Mennonite Brethren Church is different from the other churches mentioned. These differences are as follows:

172 Johann August Starck, *Geschichte der Taufe und Taufgesinnten* (Leipzig, 1789), 365.

173 Cornelius H. Wedel, *Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten*, II (Newton, KS: Bethel, 1902), 84.

174 Editor's note: Braun's date for the founding of the *Kleinegemeinde* is incorrect. The correct date is 1812.



1. The "old" Mennonite Church administers baptism by sprinkling or pouring; the Mennonite Brethren by immersion. Mennonites have practiced both of these modes since their beginning. The Lutheran theologian Dr. Starck writes as follows: "The oldest baptists were . . . not all agreed in their view of baptism, since some regarded immersion as necessary while others were satisfied by merely practicing sprinkling."<sup>175</sup> The Mennonite historian and theological professor, Wedel, states that the Mennonites permitted various modes of baptism. They allowed each congregation to choose the mode. One finds both modes of baptism at various times among the Mennonites, sometimes one at a time, sometimes both together.<sup>176</sup>

For example, immersion was already practiced in Switzerland in the 1420s [*sic*-1520s!] in St. Gallen, Basel and other cities.<sup>177</sup> In the region of St. Helena the minister Ulimann baptized eight hundred persons in the Sitter River.<sup>178</sup> Immersion was also practiced in South Germany, for example, in Strasbourg and Augsburg, where, among others, the well-known Hans Denk was baptized.<sup>179</sup> In Holland, both modes can be found among members of the "lenient ones" of the Amsterdam church, the "Doopsgezinde by the Sign of the Lamb"<sup>180</sup> and among groups of the "strict ones," known by the name "Danziger" because they were closely associated with the Danzig churches in Prussia.<sup>181</sup> Regarding the entire group of the "moderates" the theologian Starck states in his history: "The lenient or coarse baptists declare in favor of total immersion, but because sprinkling signifies blessings and is more suitable in northern regions, baptism by sprinkling should not be viewed as true baptism any less than immersion."<sup>182</sup>

In two Mennonite congregations in Hamburg-Altona, for about one hundred years after 1648, one church practiced sprinkling and the other immersion.<sup>183</sup> The so-called "Old Flemish," who were the

<sup>175</sup> *Geschichte der Taufe*, 404.

<sup>176</sup> Cornelius H. Wedel, *Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten*, II (Newton, KS: Bethel, 1902), 81.

<sup>177</sup> Wedel, *Geschichte der Mennoniten* II, 42 and *Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten* IV (Newton, KS: Bethel, 1904), 8.

<sup>178</sup> Hege, *Kurze Geschichte der Mennoniten*, 11.

<sup>179</sup> Wedel, *Geschichte der Mennoniten* II, 42.

<sup>180</sup> Starck, *Geschichte der Taufe*, 427, 430.

<sup>181</sup> Wedel, *Geschichte der Mennoniten* III, 68. I.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Wedel, *Abriss der Geschichte*, 87. See also Berend Carl Roosen, *Geschichte der Mennoniten-Gemeinde zu Hamburg und Altona. Erste Hälfte, Die ersten anderthalb Jahrhunderte* (Hamburg: Persiehl, 1886), 40ff and P.M. Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 296ff.

strictest followers of Menno and forerunners of the Gnadenfeld and Alexanderwohl churches, practiced both modes of baptism until the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>184</sup>

Kornelius Riesen also permitted both modes according to his Confession of Faith, which the Amsterdam "Doopsgezinde of the Sun" accepted in 1773, as did many other Mennonite churches of Holland. It states regarding holy baptism (ch. 23): "We understand holy baptism to mean dipping or submerging the whole body in water (Romans 6:4; Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:37,38) or generously sprinkling the body."<sup>185</sup>

The founding teacher Menno writes about this ceremony under the title, *Die christliche Taufe unter dem Wasser*. There we encounter scattered expressions clearly proving that he recognized both modes of baptism. We cannot clearly establish which of the two he personally received.

Even now some Mennonite congregations practice both modes simultaneously, according to the desires of the baptismal candidates. This is true of the Emmental church in Switzerland and the Romanov "old" Mennonite Church in Russia (Ser. Darinsk district). Others practice only immersion such as the United Brethren Church of Christ (since 1856) in Pennsylvania<sup>186</sup> and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren in Russia.

The Mennonite Brethren Church recognizes only immersion because it believes that this mode is closest to the Holy Scriptures. All its members must be baptized according to this mode, even those already baptized by sprinkling in another church. As is well known, the "moderates" and a few churches of the "strict" group already maintained this practice. Starck states: "The strict or refined baptists therefore also rebaptize all who come to them, not only the so-called 'coarse,' but also those from a related group of the 'refined.'"<sup>187</sup> Thus the Groningen churches baptize the already baptized Danzig members and vice versa if they wish to become members of the respective churches.

It must be emphasized, however, that in recent years a party has arisen in the Mennonite Brethren Church that did not agree with this church practice. This party, for example, arose in the Mariental

184 *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 249ff.

185 Van der Smitten, *Kurzgefasste Geschichte*, 220. See also Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 253.

186 Van der Smitten, *Kurzgefasste Geschichte*, 149.

187 *Geschichte der Taufe*, 149.

Mennonite Brethren Church, in the district and region of Samara, which introduced the acceptance of members from other Mennonite churches who had not been baptized by immersion. The so-called "old" Mennonite Church also accepted members of the Mennonite Brethren Church without rebaptism, although there are exceptional cases in which they rebaptize according to their mode.

2. Concerning participation at the Lord's Supper, the Mennonite Brethren Church has not achieved full unanimity in the last ten years. A few congregations allow guests from other churches to participate, such as the Mariental (Samara District) congregation and Rückenau (District Berdiansk, Tavrida Province), the largest Mennonite Brethren congregation in the Molotschna. The latter congregation hotly debated the question of admitting non-immersed Mennonites. In May 1903, at the meeting of leaders from all Mennonite Brethren congregations that took place at Waldheim, it was decided to allow individual members to have fellowship with believers of other confessions at the Lord's Supper. This decision undeniably caused a closer association between the two groups. It did not satisfy everyone, however, because it was precisely the admission of "old" Mennonites to the Lord's Supper that the Mennonite Brethren did not permit. Meanwhile, the number of defenders of open communion increased dramatically. As a result the question was raised repeatedly, and was finally resolved in 1914-1915 as previously decided; that is, in the Rückenau Mennonite Brethren congregation "old" Mennonites would be allowed to participate.

Other Mennonite Brethren congregations generally admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have been baptized according to their practice. According to this conception, therefore, only those members of other Mennonite congregations who have been baptized by immersion are admitted to the Lord's Supper.

3. Mennonite congregations that practice baptism by immersion differ in their views on the church ban. The view of the "moderate" Mennonites is close to that of the "strict" ones. In agreement with these, the Mennonite Brethren Church sets more stringent demands than the "old" Mennonites. For example, it demands abstinence from alcoholic beverages and tobacco smoking, and admonishment of one another regarding unbecoming behavior, as the "strict" Mennonite congregations of West Frisia had already resolved in their decisions of 1639.<sup>188</sup>



4. The Mennonite Brethren Church in principle does not oppose the marriage of Mennonite young people who have reached the acceptable age even if they have not yet been baptized, to prevent immorality (I Cor. 7:2,9) and not to compel baptism. Dutch Mennonites around 1650 already performed marriage of unbaptized individuals.<sup>189</sup>

On the issue of propaganda, the Mennonite Brethren Church does not disagree with the "old" Mennonites but shares the view set forth in the document, "The Mennonite View Regarding Religious Freedom and Propaganda," which the Molotschna Mennonite Church Council drafted on February 7, 1908. Representatives of the Molotschna, Einlage and Kuban Mennonite Brethren congregations attended this meeting, as indicated by the signatures. Representatives of all Mennonite Brethren congregations in Russia, who convened in the village of Schönsee, accepted this document. It was printed in a brochure entitled "Report Concerning the Mennonites in Russia" (Berdiansk, 1912, 17).

Points II, III and IV of this document read as follows:

We understand that Christ's mandate to "Go and teach all nations, etc." means that every Christian is obligated to spread the true Christian faith; in other words, to preach the gospel to all nations. We firmly believe the Word of God in Paul's letter to the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for all who believe" (1:16).

We refrain, however, from all active propaganda among people of other Christian confessions. We do not impose our distinctive teachings with the purpose of winning converts to our Church, or with agitated praise for our teachings compared with other Christian teachings, or slander the latter.

We are deeply convinced that only the free proclamation of the gospel in its original simplicity and purity can awaken the individual to eternal life and bring forth a new, divinely sanctioned, all-Russian throne that will benefit all and will be sanctioned by God. As it is written in 1 Tim. 4:8, "for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" [RSV]. The Apostle Peter gives guidance for the lives of all true followers of the gospel with his words in 1 Peter 2:17: "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God.

189 Friesen. *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 258.

Honor the emperor" [RSV].

Based on these explanations it is clear that none of the differences between the "old" Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren Church pertain to the principal teachings of Mennonitism, and that all have clear precedents in history.

It cannot be denied that the relationship between the two groups has not always been in keeping with the spirit of the gospel, especially at the beginning. Both groups have made offensive statements, both orally and in writing. That cannot be justified, even if these expressions were borrowed, sometimes verbatim, from Menno Simons. Menno lived and wrote at a time of little discretion in verbal polemics. In general, history also reveals that the antagonism often became most intense when it involved close relatives or when it related to events of the past.

Nevertheless, the "old" Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren congregations of various branches are building a solid indivisible whole, truly and firmly based on the principles of the faith. This has been known under the name of "Mennonite Brotherhood" in Russia since the earliest days of the Mennonite settlement.

*Spiritual minister of the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren Church  
(Heinrich J. Braun) October 1916*

# Constitution of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession in Russia (1917)<sup>190</sup>

## I. General Matters

1. The Evangelical-Mennonite Confession in Russia is a Protestant confession and subscribes to the teachings based on the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments.<sup>191</sup>

2. The Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall have all the legal rights that other confessions and churches in Russia enjoy.

3. The Mennonites may exercise their religious practices without hindrance according to their established policy and practice.

4. As a citizen of the Russian state, every Mennonite shall be guaranteed freedom of conscience. He may exercise the same civil and political rights as all other Russian citizens and may not be persecuted or restricted regarding his religious convictions.

## II. The Church

1. The adherents of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall constitute a distinct society that is fully autonomous in its internal administration, development and church order, enjoys all juridical rights, and possesses a church seal.

2. The Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall be granted the right to:

- a. Own and dispose of fixed and movable assets.
- b. Build and maintain houses of worship and churches, with the right to church bells.
- c. Establish cemeteries.
- d. Establish and maintain schools, all types and levels of teacher training institutions and other educational institutions, hospitals and various other God-honoring institutions.

190 Translated from the German in A.H. Unruh, *Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde*, 312-14. The document was published as Appendix 3 in Abe Dueck, "Mennonites and the Russian State" pp. 483-485. One page of the original Russian version, including I, 1-4 and the preamble, are in Russia Related Documents, CMBS, Box 5, Folder 17. Unruh has the preamble, followed by the 1914 Statute/Confession and then the Constitution of 1917 (pp.309-314).

191 This statement was expanded from a previous version.



*Note 1. In all state teacher-training institutions, the Evangelical-Mennonites shall be allowed to teach God's Word, in the mother tongue, at the request of the parents or guardians.*

*Note 2. Only persons who can produce evidence of specific authorization by the Church Council to teach the Word of God shall be permitted to teach as referred to in Note 1.*

3. The assembly of members who have been admitted on the basis of holy baptism shall be the governing body of the congregation.

4. The spiritual teachers, that is, the elders and ministers who are elected by the congregation and are not subject to authorization by the state government, shall be the spiritual leaders of the congregation.

5. Every spiritual teacher shall be presented to the district government office for registration immediately after his appointment.

6. The spiritual teachers of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall enjoy the same civil and political rights and privileges enjoyed by spiritual persons of other confessions.

7. The Congregational Council, which consists of the spiritual teachers, deacons and elected members of the congregation, shall be the representative and administrative body of the congregation.

8. The duties of the Council shall include the supervision of all congregational affairs and the supervision of religious and ethical instruction in the educational institutions for which they are responsible.

9. The congregational registers of the Evangelical-Mennonite Confession shall be kept by a person who is elected by the congregation from among the spiritual teachers or other members of the congregation. This person shall have complete responsibility for the accuracy of the congregational records.

10. The issuance of certificates and extracts from the congregational register shall be subject to the signed authorization of the elder or his representative minister together with the church stamp.

11. The establishment of new Evangelical-Mennonite congregations within the borders of the Russian state shall depend entirely on those involved in establishing the same, insofar as this is not related to any funding by the state treasury, but is funded by the assets of the existing congregation. The submission shall be made to the district civil authority.

### III. General Conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Congregations of Russia

1. The General Conference of the Mennonite Congregations of Russia, which is elected from the congregations and is empowered with all legal rights and possesses its own seal, shall be the uniting body of the Evangelical-Mennonite congregations of Russia.

2. The General Conference shall seek to clarify issues in every respect and, as much as possible, resolve religious and ethical issues and general issues of a spiritual nature. It shall be the central body that functions in the interests of all the Evangelical-Mennonite congregations of Russia.

3. The General Conference may make binding resolutions for the congregations on the following issues:

a. Matters that concern the relationship of the whole religious community to the state. It shall solicit submissions of general questions concerning the Confession.

b. Matters that relate to the needs of those in state service.

c. Matters that pertain to our Confession of Faith regarding welfare institutions and educational institutions, within the prescribed limits of the same.

4. The Commission for Church Affairs of the Evangelical Mennonite congregations of Russia shall be the executive body of the General Conference. It shall consist of the chairman and not fewer than three members who shall be elected by the General Conference.

5. The rights and duties of the Commission shall be established by special bylaws, which shall be formulated and ratified by the General Conference and may also be expanded and revised by the same.

6. The General Conference shall meet to deliberate on congregational affairs as often as necessary, but not less than once a year.

7. The Commission for Church Affairs shall give no less than one-month-advance notice of a convention to all the congregations by sending invitations and an agenda.

*Chairman of the Commission for Church Affairs  
of the Mennonite Congregations of Russia  
David Epp*





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